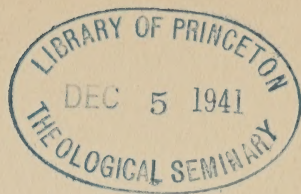


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An enlightened conscience

AN
ENLIGHTENED
CONSCIENCE



AN ENLIGHTENED CONSCIENCE

by

Irl Goldwin Whitchurch

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AN ENLIGHTENED CONSCIENCE

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FIRST EDITION

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To
MY MOTHER

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*Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose
runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of
the suns.*

ALFRED TENNYSON, Locksley Hall, line 137

*The moralist cannot teach what is revealed; he must reveal
what can be taught.*

WALTER LIPPMANN, A Preface To Morals, p. 318

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
JOHN VIII, 32

*The great fact of human history is its resurgent quest of the
Good Life, to be the measure of the Good World and the
Good God.*

HARTLEY BURR ALEXANDER,
Contemporary American Philosophy, Vol. I, p. 105

*The origin and end of all philosophy is consequently to be
sought in ethics.*

FRIEDRICH PAULSEN, A System of Ethics, p. 3

Acknowledgments

Where sources are known I have sought to give direct credit. Yet I am very much aware that my gleanings are from innumerable sources, across years made rich by friendships and by great books. To each of these unnamed persons I am deeply grateful. In a more recent company are my teachers, students and friends. They have given freely of themselves. I have been made their debtor. Special thanks are due to my wife, Dr. Anna Kellman Whitchurch. Her contributions are at every hand and in manifold ways that make possible the labors of others. Such assistance I can only gladly acknowledge.

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November 16, 1940*

Foreword

Among all the inconsistencies that dog the steps of Christians today, the laurels go to the provisions made for moral illiteracy. On one hand we profess a religion that rests its claim to distinction upon the unique moral requirements for discipleship and upon the moral perfection of our God. Yet no considerable attention has been given to a critical understanding of moral experience. There has been moralizing aplenty, but that is something else. To a large degree Christians have resigned to obfuscation the one indispensable condition for clarifying the essential goal of Christian character. The time has come for clear thinking and plain speaking on this point.

Consider for a moment that the aim of Christianity is to help men grow into mature sonship with a God of perfectly righteous love—to become like Him in spirit and to live daily with all men in ever-enriching communion with the God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time the clarification of that goal has been left to cumulative common-sense opinion. Not that Christians are without the adornment of the graces of a good character. Many of them in every age have achieved a *summa cum laude* distinction in that direction. How much of that achievement is traceable to a distinctively Christian consciousness? How much more is it due to a common-sense moral heritage that belongs to a contemporary culture? Is the source to be found less in any life drawn from the distinctively Christian tributary in the stream of general history, and more from the plain decencies of a secularized rational world? In short, an elemental moral appreciation belongs to man as a human being. Christian faith does not find him morally destitute. Religion does not generate *de novo* the conscience of mankind.

Let us try to be clear about this situation. The Christian religion has exerted a most profound influence for the moral regeneration of its world. Often it has proven to be the very salt of the earth, a light set upon beacon hills overlooking a very difficult terrain. Yet, who can maintain that its moral resources have been directed by the best available understanding on the nature of its goal, and so also on the best means for implementing its achievement? Plainly Christians should not continue to leave to haphazard surmises and to accessory operations what Christianity claims as its primary purpose. One question is, how long will we treat as a by-product that which we acclaim to be of central significance? Not even in the curriculum of the theological seminaries has a systematic study of ethics found more than a grudgingly given place.

With rare exception, the subject matter of ethics is attached to one of the more traditionally approved subjects. As a result, two types of courses are offered in the field. First comes the type where moral principles are deduced from theological premises. In that case a theological system, presumably independent of morality, has been postulated. From the standpoint of the Christian religion such a set of non-moral theological ideas is a monstrosity. Ethical principles so derived would be an imaginary impossibility. Consequently what actually happens is that Christian ethics so conceived is allowed to become an amplifier of opinions from a temporarily respectable tradition. A second type of "Christian ethics" which emerges from this general approach usually assumes the name of social ethics. It is neither ethics nor Christian. It is an accumulation of psychological and sociological data from which are derived suggestions about prudent conduct under a certain set of circumstances. That concoction cannot be ethics because a reductionistic naturalism has squeezed out all distinctively moral meaning from the terms employed. That is one method for lauding Christian ethics, after its vitals have been drawn. Misused social science studies, on the

other hand, cannot be a Christian ethics even though they are veneered by a pious phraseology. In the eyes of historic Christianity that approach is a most virile form of contemporary atheism. So much is obnoxiously self-evident. Yet these are the unintelligible alternatives which claim the dominant approaches to the field of Christian ethics, where some attention is actually accorded the subject.

Why? In attempting an answer, many factors clamor for a place on the list. Just now we are concerned with two of them. Most prominent is a prevailing assumption about the nature of Christianity. Christian faith, it is held, is divinely revealed. Since that is so, our main attention must be given to the instrument of that revelation. Does God reveal Himself in the Scriptures, or the church, or in the individual witness of the spirit? Take your choice. Some say the church because the Scriptures require an interpreter, and also because interests of such importance cannot be left to individual conviction. The logic of that approach then demands the development of an infallible authority. The issue accordingly shifts to that of certifying the certifier, not the revelation. And when you get a certificate, it rests in your hand, not in your understanding. For, religion continues to be something that can be draped over one's reputation, but not a spirit of life within the soul. All the invocations addressed to the faith by men, saints or angels, cannot work the impossible miracle of making an authoritarian faith personal.

Two alternatives remain: Scriptural authority and individual conviction. The latter eliminates itself when taken simply as private opinion. No one would think of identifying the revelation of God with unverified opinion. Hence Protestant Christians have usually found it convenient to appeal to the Bible as the foundation of their personal faith. Then with a sense of the paramount importance of religious truth they have felt impelled to add theories of Scriptural authority as an extra bulwark of their faith. Most simple and direct stands the theory of verbal inspiration. Hereupon sophistry

has the time of its life. To begin with, the Bible contains the Word of God, not a part of it but the book as a whole. Therefore any article of belief attested by Scriptural authority forms part of a Christian's philosophy of life. One historical reason for this arises from the repudiation of ecclesiastical authority as the guide to faith and action. The Bible has been substituted for the church. The very impact of this protest opened wells of emotional response which carried theory of Biblical inspiration beyond the bounds of common sense.

However, the rejection of one oversimplified theory of Scriptural authority does not dispense with the problem. For Protestantism that issue is still in the acute stage. Consider some of the reasons why this is the case. Overtowering them all are the unique place and function of the Scriptures within the Protestant interpretation of Christianity. For the large majority, it is still a Bible-centered religion. Wherever educational procedures are developed, the Scriptures, in name at least, dominate the whole picture. Our curricula of religious instruction are Bible-oriented.

A second reason arises near by, with the arrested development of the historical view of the Bible. Biblical criticism has cultivated over and over the field of the method of composition, date, and religious teachings of the various sections in this guidebook of the faith. Numberless volumes seek to throw light upon the historico-social conditions shaping the life situations out of which these writings emerge. In this task all the tools of modern scholarship have been utilized, from the spade of the archaeologist to the tenuous hypotheses about *Formen Geschichte*. In many quarters it has been recognized that these studies are good as far as they go. Yet valuable as they are, they do not directly tackle the central issue about religious authority. Some students get tangled in the picture frame and the canvas, and lose sight of the idea of the artist. Consider for a moment that these historical studies are part of our indispensable equipment. But they cannot be taken as an answer to our whole need, nor even the pri-

mary part of it. The reason is that the center of this divine drama is constituted by spiritual values. The tools of historical research deal with the form conditions, not with the values themselves. That is right and proper, so long as we understand the nature of the tools we are using. Take Jesus, as a crucial example. Where are the authentic teachings of Jesus found? Just what portions of the Gospels are his? Once these questions and many others were thought to be answered by historical studies. Now we know that in all probability many questions of this kind will never be answered. Even if historical evidence continues to mount and many present enigmas are solved, it is plain that value and validity raise questions of an entirely different order. A detailed historical account of how anything comes to be, leaves to one side the question of its essential significance. That is the final barrier which historical method cannot cross. It is high time to quit pretending.

We are standing therefore at the threshold of a new need in our approach to Biblical interpretation, one which concentrates upon the issue of its rightful authority in the Christian life. By new approach I do not mean that Bible studies have not been the thorny hunting ground for moralizers. Unfortunately they always have. Least of all do I suggest that this approach ignores the excellent results of Biblical scholarship. On the contrary, it welcomes these labors heartily. I am thinking of supplementation, not exclusion. As a modest contribution to the making of this approach these pages are written. The central idea is that, rightly understood, the Scriptures contain invaluable source material on the universal moral situation. Taken in their historico-social context these writings shed one increasing light upon what is primary in man's moral experience. Morality is always seen as auxiliary to a religious outlook. To the everlasting credit of these people, let it be said that they made remarkable progress in moralizing their religion. But the fact remains that their eyes and ours are cast upon the moral life solely as a fruit of religious

faith, *not as a root consideration in constructing that faith.* That difference which first appears to be small is really great to the point of a revolutionary contention. The life and crucifixion of Jesus bear eloquent testimony on that point.

Second. After two thousand years Christianity has succeeded in developing no cogent presentation of the moral situation. Entirely too much has been left to unexamined assumptions and surmise. Indeed, Christian moralists have come very near to making a mess of their responsibility. To this day, almost without exception, Christian ethics remains a theological ethics. We are continually reminded that this form must abide. All other roads are closed. Given such and such a set of theological ideas, ethics follows as a deduction and practical application of these ideas. Theology subtends ethics. Christian ethics becomes in fact a tail on a theological kite. While I have no desire to press the analogy, the idea must be emphasized that ethics has not been allowed to enter *constitutively* into the very marrow of religious thought.

In the *third* place, I need only to point out, without lengthy discussion, that a terrible burden of immoral theological ideas has developed within the Christian church, and has been imposed upon its disciples. Much of it borders so close to the verge of blasphemy that Christians should be much more conscious of its presence. Many of the songs, hymns, prayers, and preachments put to shame the spirit and teaching of Jesus. Doubtless the center of the most fulsome sinning concerns theories of salvation, especially where those theories impinge upon the subject of the crucifixion. What a loathsome spirit is attributed to God in various sentiments about the atonement! A really moralized theology would deliver us from a load of these remnants of barbarity.

Finally, along with this oversight goes a failure to appreciate the nature of Christianity. Among the living religions of the world Christianity rests its claim to superiority on its moral uniqueness. It is solidly based upon the Hebrew-Jewish tradition. Despite the temporary aberrations of that tradition

about finality, Christianity draws from it a moral impetus and a perspective that could contribute to the everlasting enrichment of mankind. Christianity reaches its climactic expression in the majestic moral personality of Jesus. In him God speaks His best truth. That truth points up the moral integrity of God as the ideal of human life. His kingdom on earth prescribes one condition: that a man hunger and thirst after righteousness as it is in God the Father. But always the righteousness of God requires for its interpreter nothing less than the moral integrity of Jesus. No writings are sacred enough to be allowed to displace him. That ideal stands far ahead of us. Very early Christian thought theologized Jesus into defective creeds. More recently Christians have utilized the sciences, and have accordingly boxed him in psychological terminology. Psychologies naturally spread under the charm of social ideas, and Jesus is pictured as a composite lay figure of a first-century Palestinian Jew. All that can be changed. A new era is upon us. At long last Christians may make the supreme adventure, and pay the price of discovering the relatively unknown moral personality by which the world is actually being saved, and the character of God, for the first time in history, declared in fully intelligible language. We Christians cannot too often be reminded of him who in the divine likeness of his character "brought life and immortality to light," and by the same token declared the crowning glory of God to be His perfectly righteous love.

Some readers will doubtless be perplexed for a time over the mixture of religious and ethical terminology. I have no defense, except that the problems raised invite that kind of freedom. Personally it has always been helpful to try to state an idea in various languages. Always the question keeps coming back, What is the central idea in a situation? How can the idea be stated from another point of view? The meaning of an idea is central, the language instrumental. Sometimes the new language will shed fresh light. My primary interest in these pages lies with the development of an

enlightened conscience. That spirit of life which is conscience I find at work on every hand and in manifold forms. The main thing is to keep conscience on the march. Conscience is too disposed to stop at some way-station, and insist upon making that the end of the journey. A look-out point is located quite a distance from the top of Mount Rushmore. The perspective from the top is very much improved. I am interested in the improved perspective. A change of language sometimes marks just that improvement. Breaking over an accustomed language in religion, ethics, the sciences, or philosophy at times brings a new exposure. No argument, I take it, is necessary to augment our sense of need for a perpetually enlightened conscience, one which surveys the higher levels and so saves our haphazard journeyings from futile meandering. We have nothing to say about whether conscience will be our guide. That has been settled for us. The *kind* of a conscience we have therefore does constitute our major responsibility.

AN
ENLIGHTENED
CONSCIENCE

A Faith That Lives

IN ITS deepest intent Christianity is a faith that lives. In it the divine initiative gains relevance to the human situation. Whereupon it shines with increasing light into human affairs, revealing itself as an eternal spring of perfectly righteous love, and transforming every personality in whom its spirit dwells. In short, Christianity is a faith in God *and* a good life with men. Its faith lives by bearing the fruits of righteous love. These two—faith in God and the good life—are indivisibly one and inseparable. Like the inside and outside of a cup, you cannot have one without the other. Either taken alone or in false perspective in relation to the other, presents a truncated Christianity. Faith and the good life mutually build or destroy each other. They live and die together. Faith apart from righteousness is a feint. A faith of sheer devotion is headed toward fanaticism. A righteousness that is cut off from God as the ultimate reality is a counterfeit and a delusion. It is as impossible to think of Christian faith apart from righteousness as to speak of a picture without union of form and content; a song, without words set to music; music, apart from a fusion of interval and time pattern.

I. A DOUBLE ORIENTATION

In the Hebrew-Jewish background out of which Christianity came, this polarity of religion works itself out in the functions of priest and of prophet. Each accents the human-divine relationship in a peculiar manner. It is easy for either aspect to get out of balance. Presumably the priest focused his eyes on God and divine things. Accordingly he was concerned with sacred apparatus—sacrifices, ritualistic minutiae, the exact prescriptions of the Law, with buildings, ordinations, offerings and programs. Thus temporarily conforming to the world he sought the means for reaching out unto God. God

is far away. Holy at first signified remoteness, unapproachableness. Faith means correct information about God plus devotedness. Religion functions as a bridge over a chasm. It lays hold upon God as an instrument within the human venture for salvation. The priest is a fashioner of faith in God, through appropriate instruments.

The prophet developed another spiritual prospect. He assumed the divine nearness and initiative. God confronts man with categorical imperatives. An immense moral distance must be overcome. God's eternally righteous will runs diametrically opposed to the flux of human expediency. Only in His will is man's peace. Wherefore God's righteous will inaugurates the processes of human transformation and guidance. And because we too recognize the rightfulness of the divine authority, God's will is not a foreign decree. With admirable candor the prophetic lawgiver moves on toward Fatherhood. "Come now, let us reason together. . . ." Religion is a fellowship, not merely an obedience. Fellowship concentrates on working out the divine will for an everyday life. God's righteous will and eternal purpose moves far beyond the human achievement; it remains an unqualified command. That will is also oriented to human well-being. Religion means translating the righteous will of God into the language of human relationships. Prophetic religion specializes on raising the quality tone of human life. More life means morally higher.

II. DIFFERENT KINDS OF JUSTICE

Since in Christianity faith and its expression in a new mode of living mutually determine each other, it makes a difference what kind of faith and of righteousness one is talking about. Christian faith signifies a distinctive kind of faith. The outlook of Paul the Christian was very different from Saul the Rabbi. Christian righteousness means a distinctive brand of good living. Jesus had the prophet's outlook. Faith always implements right living. He was more disturbed by the good-

ness of "good" people than by the badness of "bad" people. One of the most comprehensive and penetrating of his words underscores that very point. How disturbing that axiom must have been: "For I say unto you, except your *dickaiousune*, righteousness or justice, exceed the righteousness of the scribe and Pharisee, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom." That higher justice was measured by a very different norm, by the righteousness of God Himself. "The last shall be first, and the first, last." That is revolutionary enough.

The growing hostility toward Jesus started with a clash on the idea of justice. Those who scrupulously kept the *Torah* were so sure of their election to God's favor. They were angered and scandalized at the idea that the Law fell short of the divine righteousness. Jesus digressed radically from their righteousness, a righteousness in which the original meaning of *tzedaqah* had been changed to "acts of benevolence." The term at first referred to the moral character of God. By extension it applied also to the righteousness of a man when he obeys the law of God. In Deuteronomy VI, 25, for example, the accent falls upon a strict obedience to the divine command. Later it broadened to mean "the loving acts of the pious" what is commonly called "works." In New Testament times almsgiving had assumed a rank of prime importance among the *Gemiluth Chasidim*. The deadening compromise had set in on the expression side of their religion. What the teachings of Jesus makes sun-clear is that as a consequence of this shift they declared their faith in a very different kind of God.

III. DISCOVERING THE WILL OF GOD

It would be a mistake to regard these all too obvious transformations of religion as a relapse from a higher standard. That unfortunate manner of speech has saturated our vocabulary, giving rise to misleading ideas about human experience. What happened with these religious ancestors of ours should be instructive to us. The prophet set before the people

what he believed to be a universal norm for them as the people of God. They acclaimed the commandments of God as their guide. Whereupon they made a discovery of incalculable importance. The will of God must first be discovered and translated into terms of human relationships. The discovery and translation go together. The process is costly. The price comes high. Revelation requires an appropriate receiver, not just a revealer.

It is one thing formally to hail the will of God as the law of good living. To grasp the divine ideal and to clothe it with appropriateness in concrete conduct is a very different thing. The reason is that we begin on the human side of this divine-human relationship, not on the divine side. We set out with a human comprehension of God's will. Plainly the will and the comprehension are not the same. After centuries of experimentation and growth the Hebrews formulated the divine will in terms of the *Torah*. Commandments multiplied. Interpretations roamed wide and free. Authorities clashed. But where in all this melee of opinions through the centuries is the will of God to be found? Obviously, God's righteous will gets confused with some very human traditions about that will.

Let us forego censure. Throughout the ages the divine initiative has accomplished much by way of penetrating human limitations and insinuating the grace of his spirit into struggling and responsive personalities. First in order comes the man whom we hail as prophet. His disconcerting cry is ever a variation on the word of John, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of God is at hand." But repentance marks only one indispensable step. It is a far cry from "a face turned from the clod" to a mature son of a righteous God, to a religious man with the moral-spiritual stature of Jesus of Nazareth.

Only the heaven of poetic dreams lies all about us in our infancy. In order of time sequence the poet had events reversed. Not many of us came into this world "trailing clouds of glory." No man of wisdom interprets human life mainly

as a process of disillusionment. Rousseau thought badly when he said that mankind was everywhere born in freedom, but had forged for itself the chains of slavery. In this outlook a grain of truth nestles in a bale of excelsior. Like the Hebrews, actual people set out from a cave in God's garden called the world. From the near-savagery of nomadic life they migrate and climb through the pastoral and agricultural stages toward a national life. After that comes captivity, exile, dispersion, persecution, semi-illusory returnings, only to find that the only permanent attainment of a people is a discipline of soul. Verily the kingdom of God is within men who are not too safely anchored in tradition, otherwise known as the Hebrew or American way.

It would be nearer the truth to visualize the scribe and the Pharisee as an epitome of the gigantic struggles involved in growing up. Relapse is not the key word. An imaginary conscience cannot really collapse. One cannot lose what he has never possessed. The mistranslation of the divine commandment into "living acts of pious men" or just charity, represents genuine achievement, and not willful perversions of a perfect vision. Human perversity began to operate only as legalists sought to reduce a living righteousness to petty system, and to constitute that system a final authority for all men.

IV. SETTING OUT FROM THE HUMAN SIDE

All these considerations derive from the basic circumstance that in religion as elsewhere we set out in the order of experience from the human side of the religious relationship. God initiates, guides and undergirds our steps, but the fact remains that we ourselves must learn to walk. It is significant therefore that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian ideal, concentrates upon the manner of our living. God meets us there, in terms of moral illumination and spiritual enfranchisement. Except your righteousness excel these other varieties of living. . . . That is the new declaration of independence, the

shining milestone on the road to spiritual maturity. There is no such thing as a right relation with God apart from a just relationship with men. The Fourth Gospel makes Jesus condense the specific test as follows: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another."

Love in this connection is something very remote from a sentimental attitude. Within it are wholesome sentiment and robust attitude; but at its heart lives a keen appreciation of values. Love therefore denotes a different and a better way of living together. Discipleship signifies a distinctive brand of righteousness. The mountain peak summary of Christian teaching is immersed in the task of distinguishing the real thing from its counterfeit competitors. "Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you." "Gods and men agree that justice be done," said Plato, "but what is justice?"

Jesus undertakes to answer. Accordingly he shows himself a thorough revisionist. What had been said of olden time constituted a valuable portion of moral education for a race. One stage does not of itself make a journey. Look ahead and consider that God wills a better way. The *Torah* had commandments enjoining certain kinds of action: hatred of one's enemies, vengeance, oath taking, minute ceremonial specifications. Many of those requirements belonged to an outgrown stage of development. A new level of requirements were now in order. More important still, to specify actions is not enough. Every deed implicates an agent. The two are inseparable parts of one life. "By their fruits ye shall know them," if you are a good judge of actions. Fruits express the nature of a tree. Men do not gather grapes of thorn trees. Wherefore, if you mean to get at the heart of the problem, plant the right kind of a tree. The *Torah* with complete propriety had required: thou shalt not kill or commit adultery. The insight of Jesus penetrated beyond the overt act. It is too late to begin there, for one thing. Out of the heart are the issues of life. Therefore God wants a renovated spirit, one that hate and lust do not defile. Unless the inside of the

cup be clean, it is not a *good* cup, although it may be very useful.

Jesus summoned disciples in whom love had displaced hate, and who therefore lived above retaliation, murder, and the prostitution of other personalities. Their simple promise was good by reason of an acknowledgment of moral obligation. No further binding implements were necessary. Indeed, group approval or compulsion are incidental to a spirit of inner integrity akin to the righteousness of God. The leaven of that higher and more discriminating point of view worked such transformations that it lighted up a people's hope about the good news of the kingdom. A new way of life appeared as a genuine possibility, emerging spontaneously from the spirit of good will. With revealing candor the Acts of the Apostles designated the disciples of Jesus as the people of the way. They lived differently, and that living declared the quality of their faith.

V. A MORAL ACCENT

The plain man who made up his estimate of Jesus on the basis of what he observed classified him with the prophetic succession. For centuries the prophets had developed a distinctive religious accent. Jesus was only "fulfilling" it. In the first place, prophetic religion validated itself in a higher justice as the law of human relationships. Over against the ritualistically precise worship of their god, Amos thundered a new demand. "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."¹

These apparently unmeasured words have their background. Centuries of religious practices had centered about

¹ Amos V, 21-24.

the deification of the natural impulse of man considered as organic to physical nature. The Old Testament identifies the whole complex of its fleeting forms as Baal-worship. The prophet creates the tension between biotic man and his moral-spiritual reach. In the end, the ancient Baal outlook had nurtured an economic despotism that reached a fever heat in exploitation of the masses. Even the formal sabbath and festival regulations were irksome. When will these restrictions end, that we may get on with our business?² As usual their business ever devised new ways to cut the corners in the interest of larger profits. Earlier Hebrew laws and customs had devised numerous ways of alleviating poverty in the country districts, by rights such as the gleaners claimed.³ Now urban poverty constituted a new chapter in human misery. Heavy taxation and usury forged new chains of slavery by taking anything beyond what was absolutely essential to a bare subsistence. On that level where callous greed drives the powerful on to ruthless plunder of the weak, living had become intolerable.

Incipient revolt lowered on the social horizon. On occasion this threat proved more potent than the prophet's scorn and dire predictions of divine intervention. Hence the compromise prudence in a systematic charity and almsgiving. Certain privileged men had an eye and a half on the returns, and half an eye on the charity. For a time charity became the best business policy. But the prophet alone knows how foolish men may become. After building larger barns, they circumscribe human life with an animal horizon and say, "Soul, thou has much goods; take thine ease." Or with better success, they imitate the Pharisee, who on going to the temple to pray, comfortably reminded himself of his painted virtues gained by dispensing out of his surplus. How he came by his store was not a question to be raised. His concession to the proph-

² Amos VIII, 5.

³ Lev. XIX, 9; Deut. XXIV, 19-21; Lev. XXV, 3-7.

et's demand for a righteousness akin to that of God could not reach so deeply.

In the second place, prophetic religion always confronts the laws of men with a higher will of God. This phenomenon has two important phases. First, in Old Testament language, a prophet always speaks with an invincible preface, "Thus saith the Lord." That was his way of saying that an irreducible meaning constitutes moral distinctions. That meaning is grounded in the nature of things, and only secondarily related to human agreements or approval. He always spoke in the unconditioned imperative form. That followed upon his salient distinction between the different levels of morals. His specialty was to raise the level of justice, by clearing and by expanding the moral horizon. Such is the background of that disturbing intrusion in the gospels: "The last shall be first, and the first, last." On the more immediate side, the story takes the form of a developing human conscience; on the far side, yet inextricably involved in that story, are the penetrating rays of the divine initiative. For the will of God can be comprehended only as it insinuates its way into human experience.

VI. A COVENANT RELATION

Another phase in this human-divine opposition idea harks back to the Hebrew idea of a covenant relation. That notion marks a milepost in advance for human thinking. It celebrates an achievement in which the human personality has broken through the encasements of physical nature. Now the human stands, at some points at least, liberated from a rigid compulsion of "natural" relationships and enters upon a freedom of personal intercourse. On the level of nature the future was supposed to be settled by the past. Creativity and self-conscious direction were out of the question. Now a man lays hold on his spiritual heritage. He covenants with God. That marks his distinctive creaturehood. Man negotiates with God about his own destiny. For the first time he becomes

aware of his divine sonship. God concedes to him the basis of self-respect in his trustworthiness, in mutual regard, and in his free dedication.

Covenant relationship is a perilous gift. Its meaning dawns slowly. A staff may be mistaken for a club. Medicine misused acts as a poison. A truth often misfunctions as a lie. So with the covenant doctrine. Some people said special relationship means special privilege. That set a new task for the prophet-teacher. The task proved to be long-drawn and arduous. He punctuated their cherished convictions with an emphatic, "No, the truth stands otherwise." They had reasoned with themselves. We are the people of Jehovah, and therefore his special responsibility. Jehovah must defend us, regardless. Since Jehovah is for us, He is against other nations. To all these provincial notions Amos declares in Jehovah's name: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities."⁴ For those who believed that their covenant relation involved the magic of compulsory divine protection, the prophet pronounced a thousand woes. Consider for illustration a passage from Isaiah:

"Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill and he digged it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I

⁴ Amos III, 2.

will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry." (Isaiah V, 1-7)

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol hath enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, descend into it. And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled: but Jehovah of hosts is exalted in justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness." (Isaiah V, 13-16)

Instead of vengeance and exclusiveness one of the prophets ventured a gracious God, plenteous in mercy toward all peoples. Even those who had despoiled the land with their despotic wars might be restored to the family of nations. "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."⁵

VII. RELIGION OUT OF BALANCE

Religions show a deep-rooted tendency to drift toward otherworldliness. That does not mean necessarily a flight from everyday interests where one awaits for the consummation of a future life in another sphere. Puritanism, for instance, quite generally signifies one variety of otherworldliness. It calls to

⁵ Isa. XIX, 24-25.

mind the New Testament idea of separation from the world. The medieval holy orders and the mystics tried to be Christian after that pattern. The accent is mainly negative. They gave up the world.

More frequently, however, otherworldliness works out a separation of religious faith from increasingly discriminate moral demands in account with everyday living. The accent now shifts to the delights of here and now, but is loath to surrender the rewards of faith. By a rationalization process the up-to-date other-worlding prefers a religion whose requirements can be formally met on schedule time, without much interference with the satisfactions of his secularized life. His body constitutes an intimate and friendly part of himself. Reputation and social position also nourish his endeared ego. Although saturated by a thoroughgoing absorption in this world, his religion at the same time provides the consolations of a faith. Religious faith is an adornment of respectability here, but more an especially paid-up insurance policy on any hereafter which may require it. His mind resembles that of a quipster who, writing for the *Wall Street Journal*, doesn't think there is a hell, but would give fifty cents to be sure.

Streamlined otherworldliness in religion might be regarded as an inveterate longing after pygmyhood. This is just another name for a refusal to grow up. To be born as a child expresses nature in one of its most entrancing modes. By the same token, to remain a child, thwarting all the potentialities of mature personality, constitutes life's most grotesque bit of sophistry. In that enterprise the point of departure in experience gets twisted into its destination. Inertia becomes the outstanding law of life. Religious faith serves as an addendum, a something added on. Its range is encompassed by words of comfort, consolation, confirmation and boisterous affirmation. Organizational activity for its own sake conceals the fact that stagnation is its end. At length, faith does not live; it vegetates and damns.

In this connection history shows that Christians have a difficult time holding together faith and the good life in the proper balance. For most part the lag now runs toward the kind of otherworldliness just cited. One deep-seated reason for this outcome is the costliness of the good life. Jesus did not overstate the rigorous demands of Christian discipleship. Neither did he underestimate the response when he spoke of the minority which would find their way into the kingdom. The great cost is for a continuous personal regeneration. Men are forever engaged in cutting down that demand. The first step of evasion proposes the remaking of the world. The ideal of Jesus entails self-transformation, both as a condition and as a result. Either, then, the scene of moral regeneration must be postponed in time or transferred to another world. Where that happens faith is inevitably pared down to a position of puny irrelevance, so far as application to life situations are concerned. Reduced to such straits a feverish activity about programs and institutions supposedly compensates for forthright thinking. Thereby religion abdicates its unique mission, and is reduced to the list of glorified service clubs. For many reasons the world will never lack activity. Action has its springs in our animal inheritance. What matters is the quality of thinking that directs our action. For religion that is still a paramount issue.

Within Christianity the developing of a perspective in which faith and righteous living are held in balance becomes a perennial problem. It has always been so. When Jesus died there were possibly a score of persons who had a fair grasp of his philosophy of living. Late in his career members of the inner circle were making strange suggestions about what to do. They seemed only vaguely to apprehend the general direction of his vision. Perhaps the best known among Pauline letters is a fragment on the qualifications of discipleship. It is oriented toward a stiff rebuke for "faith" Christians. Evidently there had been not a little boasting about their own piety. Paul gets down to specifics in regard to what tests are

to be applied. Various persons in Corinth were letting it be known that they could speak with tongues, had acquired the gift of prophecy, had penetrated the mysteries, were conscientious at almsgiving and in synagogue attendance: in short, they had a mountain-moving faith.

Paul evidently recalled the prophetic tradition of his ancestral faith in which *knowledge* of God meant awareness of His will and a commitment to it as a way of living. What knowledge he had acquired about Jesus made a profound impression upon him. Consequently Paul broke into the testimony meeting. All this, he is saying, is lopsided religion. You must be, above all, love-Christians. For "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Discipleship without this moral integrity makes a man's life as hollow as a clanging brass or a tinkling cymbal. For all time he thereby memorialized these symbols of futility.

The book of James is still more an antidote for Christians with a truncated faith. There is no equivocation on the theme that "faith apart from works is barren." In fact he rings the changes so often and uncompromisingly that he gives a rather one-sided definition of religion. Pure religion doubtless includes visiting "the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." The writer left so much unsaid that Luther called his product a book of straw. For all that, Luther missed the point of the letter. If one must go wrong, it would surely be better to go wrong with the accent of James. His ideal of regeneration for everyday human relationships cannot be minimized in any faith that lives.

If further specification on this issue is required an abundance of evidence is supplied in the course of Christian history. When Christianity left the workmanship of Paul it fell into the hands of the Fathers. They were Westerners, not Orientals. Their background was Greek thought, not a well-founded tradition in Hebrew-Jewish-Christian religion.

When united with other factors this circumstance made theirs a creed-building era. Creeds were necessary then, even as they are indispensable now. Only let some things about creeds be kept clearly in mind. A creed may be more or less adequate, and the latter variety have always been more numerous. Besides, a creed is an instrument for religious exploration, a sort of contour map, not a final edict of the Lord. Our so-called creed-building eras have much in common. All of them have come off rather badly. The Patristics constitute no exception in that regard. In the first place, on their less critical side, creeds lure that inertia of spirit which bogs down creative venturing in the life of the human soul. They are prone to assume an air of finality. In the second place, activity in creed building supplies a diversion from the costly process of personal moral regeneration. We Christians have been rather expert in their misuse. Notable examples in history make an account uninviting.

Most of the consequences of that misapplication have focused at one point—the isolation of the whole of religion from the moral implications that give it quality and relevance. Post-apostolic Christianity was quite generally effulgent in faith and short on moral living. Like us they loudly proclaimed their faith in a world reeking with sensuality, brutality and treachery. After making necessary allowance for the author's bias, it is still worthwhile to recall W. H. Lecky's comment on the Byzantine Empire. It was founded by Christians, for the benefit of Christians. Of it he said that it was without exception the most thoroughly base and despicable form that civilization had yet assumed. Much, of course, depends upon when you begin to date civilization. But the fact remains we have here an example of a Christian faith barren in moral regeneration.

When Pelagius came to Rome some centuries later he was confounded by the behavior of Christian converts. Worst of all, he found them defending themselves by the most morally deadening of all defensive arguments. Brother

Adam, they said, had sinned and passed on to them a corrupt human nature. Their argumentative attitude and apology, Pelagius retorted, was the more despicable part of their situation. No moral recovery or moral health is possible for those who evade personal responsibility. Augustinian Christians did more than repudiate Pelagius—they revealed their own moral obtuseness. Nevertheless, they had 'held fast the faith.' According to some, they saved the Christian church.

VIII. LOCATING AUTHORITY

Protestant Christianity has its own special problems on this issue. To begin with, it relocated the seat of religious authority in the Bible. Authority is very precious in religion. After repudiating the church that was, Luther soon discovered the need for something to take its place. The cry for certainty was stilled by an authoritarian word of God in the Scriptures. Most men would rather feel certain than take the risks of exploring the truth. It is still customary for general church assemblies to reaffirm their confidence in the Scriptures as the only safe guide in faith and practice.

This early Protestant theory of the Bible as an automatic rule of authority has turned out to be untenable. But such a discovery has taken centuries to mature. Meanwhile, as the results of Biblical criticism have been accumulating, new divisions within Protestantism have followed various lines of Scriptural interpretation. The Bible has always required interpretation. Who or what is to say the final word of authority? The answers given have been various and conflicting. Meanwhile two things of first importance have been taking place. *First*, the authority of the Bible has been shifting in kind, and in general illustrating the law of diminishing returns. Earlier declarations maintained the Bible as the literal word of God, and nothing but that. Every statement in the Scriptures was affirmed as the truth of God. That extreme view became untenable as the historical and developmental character of the various books became known.

Today the more careful church groups show discrimina-

tion in their appeal to the Scriptures. The range is wide open. The Old Testament stands lower than the New Testament. The Prophet surpasses the priest. The Gospels are generally accepted as the more authentically Christian part of the New Testament. The letters of Paul rank above the general epistles. The Synoptic Gospels are more historical than the Fourth Gospel. The teachings of Jesus are the guide for a Christian life. But can we be sure that all of them are recorded? In view of the composition of these writings, how can we be certain that every saying attributed to Jesus is actually his very own? These questions, and many others, are running through the minds of thoughtful persons.

A *second* result follows upon absorption with questions of the nature and extent of Biblical authority. Christian faith in this context is unintentionally transposed, and made a matter of correct belief. The reasoning is rather simple and partly valid. In order to be saved man must know the will of God. If man is to know, God must reveal himself. Where? In the Scriptures. Therefore, the Bible contains the word of God. Faith consists in knowing the divine truth and accepting it. Faith means meritorious believing. Of course, such reasoning is fallacious in many points. Mainly, its weakness consists in overlooking many essential considerations. From time to time the recollection of these omissions has given new vitality to Christian movements.⁶ Our principal concern is that preoccupation with Scriptural authority has its most unfortunate by-product in a distorted idea of faith. Faith, even Christian faith, is mutilated by overlooking its good life side. A religious faith with the moral elements left out is a monstrosity.

IX. PRIORITY OF FAITH

Protestant Christianity, however, has still another unfortunate inheritance. For many reasons it has made much of the

⁶ For example, Methodism owes much to Wesley's insistence that belief is only one element, and moral practice an essential part of Christian faith.

Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone. Whatever Paul meant by it, we cannot now, for sufficient reasons, stop to inquire. As a matter of fact he seemed to mean many things, some of them not always consistent. Our concern centers upon how the doctrine has functioned through the centuries. For this Paul cannot be held altogether responsible. Its source is usually based on sundry statements in his letters, with special accent on Romans. Among the better known passages, one occurs in Ephesians: "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."⁷ The Pauline doctrine of redemption has wide ramifications, in his own writings and in relation to other ideas. In it there is not only mystery,⁸ but magic.

Interpretations take a wide range, and not infrequently convey the idea that faith justifies one in the sight of God, quite apart from his moral integrity. That would be an insidious doctrine for any man to entertain. Not only does it mutilate faith, but its disparagement of moral living is positively vicious. Religious faith is then prostituted as a justifier of respectable moral conventions, or even becomes an accessory in moral depravity. In religious circles the sneering reference to morality tells a story all too plainly, a story that puts us to shame.

There are two main sources for this perversion of Christian faith. One hinges upon the plain fact that the achievement of a mature moral personality is very difficult. Strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leads to the abundant life. The moral demand of faith is the most rigid of all its conditions, and the most difficult of all to fulfill. The second source is an irresponsible use of Scriptural formulations. Some interpret Paul to mean that our salvation is from God. Even what genuine goodness we have is a gift of his grace. That is a good start. To this are added other more doubtful features. Presumably Paul at times contrasts yielding to God's

⁷ II, 8.

⁸ I Cor. II, 6 ff.

grace with obedience to the law.⁹ But the term law carries manifold meanings. Consequently faith is sometimes contrasted with works. One climactic sentence¹⁰ reads strangely: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness." The context does not relieve a very natural bewilderment. An inconsistent view is supplied by the author where he holds that faith produces obedience to the law and charity.¹¹ But the doctrine of salvation by grace reaches a new low where "the election of grace" apparently becomes a matter of arbitrary choice on God's part.¹² Such election is hardly worthy of God. If I understand what is involved, I would not attribute such a character to Him.

Whatever the sources, one all too common result of Protestant emphasis on justification by faith alone deserves serious attention, for by it the moral quest of a Christian personality has been made incidental to the religious life. No casuistry can make out that such an outlook is Christian, in the sense of perpetuating the vision of Jesus.

⁹ Rom. III, 20, 28; IV, 5; IX, 31.

¹⁰ Rom. IV, 5.

¹¹ Rom. III, 21; Gal. V, 6.

¹² Rom. IX, 14-16.

From Morals to Morality

IF THE Christian religion, seen in its wholeness, means both a faith in a completely righteous God *and* a morally good life with men, our next step is prescribed. How shall we improve our understanding of this good life? That is not a simple undertaking. Those among us who assume that a Christian moral understanding has been achieved are on the wrong track. Their explanations of our moral situation simply overpass important facts. For one thing, our world is crowded with fragmentary and misleading interpretations of the moral life. Unless the situation can be improved, Christian faith cannot come into its rightful heritage.

I. MORALITY ESSENTIAL

The reason lies near at hand. Apart from a clearer understanding of the good life, we can neither learn the will of God nor do it. At this point, at least, morality is essential to Christianity. At any rate, the God of Jesus most completely mediates himself to us by the manifestations of an immanent righteousness. Only in a mature moral experience do we meet God face to face. That is why Jesus summoned men to come after him, to live like him, to commit themselves to his moral ideals. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." There is a moral conditionedness about obtaining a vision of a righteous God. All the prophets have seen this, and that is the fundamental reason why they are prophets. Moral vision is a function of one's character.

Likewise, when Paul wanted to crown his message on God, he boldly affirmed that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God comes to us in the person of Christ Jesus.¹ We need not linger over details of his Christology. Overtowering it all is the idea that nothing short of the moral integrity of

¹ II Cor. IV, 6.

Jesus can frame an adequate language to convey the meaning of God. Paul made his point deliberately, and in the face of current alternatives. *Three* of them were well established among the people whom he addressed. Some said nature revealed God. "The heavens declare . . ." Yes. Nature reveals something of God. Others said that history manifests God's providential presence. The Jews developed elaborations of that theme. Again, yes. Something of God can be learned in the study of history. With more than a thousandfold devotion, still others maintained that God was found in the *Torah*. Paul agreed that very much about God could be discovered in the mastery of the sacred writings. Whereupon, Paul with all his soul, having conceded their fragmentary truths, confronted their smug solutions: The crowning light of the nature of God can be found only in the majestic personality of Jesus!

II. FOCUS OF THE BIBLE

Out of regard for this kind of an outlook, Christians have allowed their interest in the Bible to point itself up toward a better understanding of Jesus. True enough, that attempt has always been attended with limitations. All in all, the Bible is still a much abused book. Fortunately experience brings its own correctives. Only let it be remembered that the road is long and winding. We belong to a generation old in years, but only in the morning of moral-spiritual understanding.

The New Testament writers who knew better had a very difficult time pointing up the religious interest of their contemporaries with a supreme fascination for the moral personality of Jesus. Sacred books and institutions have a way of obscuring the central thing—the developing conscience of prophetic personalities. Among the most interesting early attempts along this line is one that was made by that unnamed author of the Hebrews. With what deftness he leads his readers who were inclined to linger with the traditional

fragments of illumination. He employed so persistently the big word "better." Jesus shows a better way! Look at Him! He goes the limit. "For he hath been counted worthy of more glory than Moses. . . ."²

All things considered, both they and their predecessors did remarkably well. Judging from our reactions, with all our advantages, we might have darkened still more the world's understanding by our lagging spirits. Wherefore, for our part, we might more profitably dwell upon our indebtedness to them. As a fitting token of our gratitude we could show progress in wrestling with that very problem.

III. ROAD FROM MORALS TO MORALITY

In its highest intention at least, Biblical interpretation focuses attention upon Jesus as a way of living. If this is true, we should in all seriousness come to see the Bible in a refreshing light—as memoranda on the moral anabasis from morals to morality. It portrays a grand ascent, from near savagery to the level of the Sermon on the Mount. Morals mean customary standards of conduct, what men approve. That is where the human enterprise begins. Morality includes this, and more. It goes on to develop a critical understanding of moral ideals, ways of testing them, in order to discover what ideals are true and therefore valid. Human experience begins with morals, but its goal is to discover valid norms. These norms or principles condition development toward the highest level of character, the most abundant life. Only valid norms have rightful authority over us. They concentrate on what we ought to do, what ought to be approved. Validity determines the approval, not *vice versa*.

Two principal kinds of fact urge this step upon us. *First* comes that which might be called the purpose which guides our efforts to propagate Christianity. Christians worship a God of complete moral integrity; not an unlimited power, but an eternal goodness. To become a Christian means to

² Heb. III, 3.

become like God in character, to grow into mature Sonship within His eternal kingdom. One good old word for becoming a Christian summons us to obtain salvation. Salvation as Jesus illustrated it means continuous moral regeneration, or growth into the likeness of God our Father. His righteousness sets the standard and directs the living process. Hence, I take it, the purpose of Christianity is to help all men to grow up as Sons of God, to be daily transformed by the indwelling of His holy Spirit. In simple language, Christianity proposes to develop moral personalities that are counted good, not by the approval of men, but because they embody in ever higher degree the righteousness of God Himself.

The *second* urgent consideration arises from the place which the Bible occupies within the Christian church. Here we confine our attention to what is going on in only one branch of the church universal. Such a limitation has many justifications. Chief among them is the ideal of Christian nurture which prevails in Protestantism. Within Protestant Christianity, the Bible serves as a primary source of religious instruction, where a large responsibility for Scriptural interpretation is lodged with the individual. As matters now stand, practically every resource available for education in the religious life somehow utilizes the Bible as its source material. For an overwhelming majority inside the church, and out of it, the Scriptures have come to be regarded in some sense as both the fountainhead and the final court of appeal in religion.

IV. USE OF THE SCRIPTURES

With such paramount importance attached to the Scriptures, the obligation of Protestants has been clearly set. Libraries have grown up in response to a desire to make the Bible intelligible. That story is quite generally familiar. Every now and then some one reminds us that the future of Christianity depends upon an ever more inclusive authority for these sacred writings. More than that; we are told that a people

uninstructed in the Bible cannot hope for a robust spiritual life. Without that resource the moral fiber of the race must surely deteriorate.

Concerning these and kindred conclusions about the necessity of a Bible-grounded religious faith there is considerable room for a difference of opinion. That is the case, primarily because it is not always possible to determine just what is meant by a Bible-grounded faith. Certainly there is the widest range of prevailing opinion at that point. Numerous sects have sprung up within modern Christendom. Not a few have drawn their nourishment from a special accent in Bible interpretation. If divisions are a scandal, many of them at least have a common fountainhead. In the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian church, divisions are theoretically ruled out. Church councils, and in the last analysis the Pope, provide an official interpretation. The voice of the church, then, stands outside of the sacred records and mediates their ideas to the lay mind. The voice of the church becomes in practice the *vox Dei*, the voice of God.

It is becoming increasingly difficult, however, for many persons to accept their religious faith solely upon a certificate from outside authority. For even if that authority has the truth about divine revelation, the truth becomes alive for men essentially in terms of the inner convictions which it is able to generate. Truth becomes potent in proportion as it is appreciated. That is the main reason why religious revelation can never be authenticated solely by appeal to external authority. Even revealed truth must conform to the principle of potency through personal appreciation. Its final authority depends in large part upon the rational response which it evokes.

V. A BIBLE-GROUNDED FAITH

That response, of course, must always be submitted to critical processes of examination. Test your faith, says Saint Paul, to see whether it be of God or not. And here again the cry for

a settled authority gets revived. Men crave religious certainty, because they feel so much is at stake. Why not a Bible-grounded faith? Impatient spirits among us snap out: In science probability may serve as a guide, but in religion a man must know. Much, of course, depends upon what is meant by probability and by knowledge. If probability is thought to mean only guesswork, that is not what the sciences employ. If religious knowledge means a final edition of divine truth, frozen into a formal statement, such knowledge has never been vouchsafed to any man.

I surmise God understands the conditions under which human life might reach its highest fulfillment. Hence He establishes a world in which we see all things at first as through a glass, dimly. Through patient search of a soul unafraid, new rays of light dawn upon the mind continuously. Understanding grows with critical experience. Religious insight grows under the same laws. The conditions for that growth are given, in the order of God's benevolent creation. Our understanding of the Bible doubtless follows the same laws. If so, two things should be kept clearly in mind. There is, above all, a moral price set on understanding the gradual revelation of God in the life out of which the Scriptures came. Hence, also, God has not ventured the whole of His revelation with any one part of it, or with any book form.

VI. CRY FOR AUTHORITY

One point of general agreement stands out amid all the chaos of Biblical interpretation, a medley of voices that began while the first Scriptural writings were taking form. All partisans tacitly at least agree that Biblical knowledge should increase the moral stature of its readers. That means, I take it, a general agreement that the Scriptures seek to convey moral insight and quicken the urge toward moral growth. Here the deeper logic of Christianity asserts itself. But strange to say, this argument has never been made sufficiently explicit. It has been taken more for granted, as something recognized by

all who are concerned. The question is how long will we be content with a general impression where such vital matters are involved? Can we safely assume that the moral teachings of the Bible as a whole are properly used?

From what has been done about Scriptural interpretation, that is by no means certain. What reason leads us to think that the moral contents of the Bible will fare any better than its religious ideas? Broadly considered, there are only two points of view. One is that the moral standards of the Bible are somehow valid, because they constitute a part of divine revelation. The literalist naturally takes an extreme position on this point. All of the moral ideals in the Scriptures, he thinks, rest upon the same foundation. The morals of Judges, or of the Ten Commandments, or of the prophets, or of the Sermon on the Mount are equally binding. There are many reasons, however, why that view is untenable. The one reason which should be sufficient for any Christian is that it contradicts the explicit teachings of Jesus. Every reader of the Gospels is familiar with numerous specific instances where Jesus proclaims a higher law in the face of Scriptural commands.

More enlightened representatives of this general view somewhat inconsistently defend the earlier codes as divinely established for the limited time and circumstance. The law codes enjoining vengeance, for instance, was God's instrument for the moral education of the race. To use a more crucial example, every one of the Ten Commandments forms a permanent part of a Christian morality. When confronted by the fact that God is represented as jealous, or that woman is classified as the property of her husband, or that originally these commandments held good only with respect to male Hebrews, our protagonist finds a way to save the situation by some interpretative principle. The principle most commonly invoked is called that of development. A recent writer, employing this approach, tries to maintain a double source for Christian ethics. One of them "goes to the Scriptures of

the Old and New Testaments for guidance and instructions regarding the moral principles by which the structure of society is maintained and developed.”³ Equally instructive is a later passage where the basic questions of method are up for consideration. Here again Christian ethics makes “the clear affirmation that the standards of conduct set forth in the scriptures are absolute, since they are founded upon revelation of the divine character, which in its manifestation as historical process is one with the moral order of the world.”⁴

Just how representative this general view is becomes a matter of opinion. There are many indications that this writer stands among the more honored representatives of Christian thought today. Be that as it may, a more important consideration for us is the degree of validity in the outlook before us. One very significant truth which underlies this position is that God works in the historical process by which human experience comes to moral understanding. In one restricted sense, all moral principles have their source in God. But can moral principles in this sense be identified with the “moral principles” formulated in the Old and New Testament Scriptures? Hardly. We must make a clear distinction between moral principles which help to constitute the structural framework of the nature of things, and man’s fragmentary grasp of those principles. I do not think it is possible, except in a very restricted and misleading sense, to say that “the standards of conduct set forth in the scriptures are absolute.”

VII. A SOURCE BOOK ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT

On the contrary, the standards of conduct set forth in the Bible illustrate a growing apprehension of the moral foundations of human life. Such, I take it, is the second possible approach to the issue before us. How shall the Bible be

³ A. R. Osborn, *Christian Ethics*, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

used with respect to its moral content? Our analysis thus far points explicitly in one direction. Instead of trying to use the Bible as an authoritative set of principles or rules of conduct, we must learn to take it for what it plainly indicates. The Bible is not a catechism, but a source book on a developing moral experience. Its immediate references are to the life of a people within certain historical limitations. In its pages a thousand years of ethnic history unfold. Given their specific situation, these moral regulations represent what creative spirits were able to accomplish by way of moral enlightenment. In ordinary language, the Bible contributes a valuable chapter in anybody's history of moral ideas.

That is not all. Human experience of every people and age share in common basal principles within which experience finds its framework. Human life therefore resembles a drama enacted on a stage. In this case the stage settings change with what we call historical events, but there are certain deep-lying cosmic conditions by which those events are bounded. The Hebrews thought of the cosmic framework of history as the will or purpose of God. In time, they came to think of their relation to God as including a covenant. That is, within the vast universe which depends upon God, they recognized a place for the relationship of moral freedom and responsibility. Both God and man lived within and by moral laws. The realm of personal relations, in which man began life as a moral child, distinguished his order within a created world. God wanted above all else that man should grow into full-fledged sonship and build on earth a kingdom of righteous love. That alone would make a fit dwelling place for good men, but more especially would it enable all men to realize their potentially divine sonship. Man then becomes a colaborer with God in fulfilling the eternally divine purpose of history.

The Bible begins, then, with the changing ethnic codes of behavior approved by a racial group. It reveals the tragic

struggle of a people who dug their way out of the near savagery of nomadic life; gained a foothold in semi-desert country; moved on to a simple agricultural stage of growth and beyond into urban settlements; largely by military methods they welded a semblance of a national state, and they saw it crumble; then finally, under radically changed conditions they penetrated the Mediterranean world, living in scattered countries the life of a subject people.

Any way you take it, their lot of life was hard. But on such experiences great qualities of soul are nourished. Out of the fullness of life occasioned by the tragedies and triumphs which they encountered, they wrote down a wisdom which merits the everlasting gratitude of all races of mankind. The books which came from their hand bear the marks of a particular course of historical events. Those same writings became sacred Scriptures, just because their wisdom is not of one people, but for the advantage of all peoples, not of one millennium, but of the ages.

The sheer costliness of this moral anabasis appalls any man who takes time to count. The courage these people displayed is enough to shame cowardice for all time. Perhaps, after all, that is why so many call the Book a Sacred History. If that is what it is, it was made sacred by divine activity immanent in the otherwise commonplace events of human experience. The Bible was not made sacred by being dropped from the skies, or because it was dictated by the Lord. It is so, because it portrays a double adventure. On the near side, it records the high journeyings of a people reaching after the prize of a moral character and sanctified by the struggle to that end. On the far side, it reflects the adventurous love of a righteous God, which in infinite patience works at the moral destiny of all humankind. The processes employed are ingenious, and checkered by both the sacrifice and the victory of God. That, I submit, is a high and complicated theme. Hence the dramatic moral triumphs recorded in the Bible make of it a Holy Book. It surveys

the whole range of human experience from primitive morals on, to essay the principles of a valid morality.

VIII. TWO VIEWS ON MORALS

Having now gained a developmental perspective of the Bible as a panoramic view of the moral growth of a people from morals toward morality, a very salient distinction becomes necessary. From this point on two very divergent conceptions are possible as to the relationship of morals to morality. According to one, morals convey only an elementary and limited idea of morality. On the second view, morals are identical with morality. The first alternative will be illustrated throughout our discussions. It is simply a recognition that morals taken as customary standards of conduct constitute a normal aspect in the total development of human experience. Man obtains his moral understanding just as he gains knowledge about any other phase of his world. At first our judgments about the right in action and goodness in character are elementary. These judgments change with time and circumstance, by incidental accretions, by outright contradiction, by mutual criticism, by adaptation to changing conditions. *Morals make up the record of man's changing ideas about morality.* They are therefore a vital part of morality, but not the whole of it.

This view seems amply justified by the way in which morals are formed. They are as elemental as man himself. In the exigencies of daily experience a selection of certain types of behavior and of character come to be generally favored. Doubtless the chief of a tribe, and the natural-born leaders in a group, have much to do with it. An elementary sifting process settles some standards as custom, what the group approves. Perhaps the negative side comes first in time, and then assumes a diminishing role. Tabu is the word for that. On various grounds some kinds of action are dropped out, forbidden, and disapproved. Morals, then, come to have two principal characteristics. Most prominent is the decisive

nature of group approval. The complicated and semi-incidental features which preside over the accumulating result known as custom, which indicates what conduct is appropriate for members of a group, need not concern us now. The central idea is that the attitudes of approval and disapproval determine what is right and good. The second characteristic stands out more prominently for students of history in what we call the growth of moral ideas. That growth is correlated with social history. In fact ordinary contacts between members of different communities and nations bring out the same idea. Every normal person is daily reminded of incompatible standards of conduct, and cannot be wholly unaware of the shifting status of the standards of his own group. Adjustment is the magic word. Morals continually adapt themselves to shifting human needs, in terms of social approval. Since on the inward side morals reflect dominant desires or interests of the group, they change with the tides of everyday human affairs.

Both of these interpretations work with essential agreement about materials involved, up to this point. Then comes a parting of the ways. Naturalistic moralists develop the second thesis: morality means morals, and nothing more. When the changing *mores* have been described and otherwise systemized, ethics has accomplished its day's work. No other kind of materials is found in morality. For, morality signifies just this series of interhuman agreements which designate the right and the good, and just as long as they draw along the support of social authority. For illustration we may turn to the apt phraseology of John Dewey in *Human Nature and Conduct*. Morals and morality are used interchangeably.

For practical purposes morals mean customs, folkways, established collective habits. This is a commonplace of the anthropologist, though the moral theorist generally suffers from the illusion that his own place and day is, or ought to be, an exception. But always and everywhere

customs supply the standards for personal activities. They are the pattern into which individual activity must weave itself. This is as true today as it ever was. . . . Customs in any case constitute moral standards.⁵

The term morality is on occasion used to designate the process as a whole. Then it reads: "Morality is an endeavor to find for the manifestation of impulse in special situations an office of refreshment and renewal."⁶

At the present stage of our argument two remarks about the identity of morality with morals are called for. One indicates the self-contradictory predicament into which the view lands. We will now be content with one example. Dewey will again serve as our guide.

We recur to our fundamental propositions. Morals is connected with actualities of existence, not with ideals, ends and obligations independent of concrete actualities. The facts upon which it depends are those which arise out of active connections of human beings with one another, the consequences of their mutually intertwined activities in the life of desire, belief, judgment, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. In this sense conduct and hence morals are social: they are not just things which *ought* to be social and which fail to come up to the scratch. But there are enormous differences of better and worse in the quality of what is social. Ideal morals begin with the perception of these differences.⁷

The last two sentences almost uncover the skeleton in the closet. The "enormous differences of better and worse" is a difference of quality. Qualitative distinctions do not thrust themselves upon our thinking by sheer external impact alone. Except a responsive mind contributes to that distinguishing process, it cannot emerge. That contributing factor is not here provided for. If accumulative experience is appealed to, that changes the logic involved not one whit.

⁵ Page 75.

⁶ Page 169.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 329.

To the discomfiture of this viewpoint it is true that "ideal morals begin with the perception of these differences."

Our second observation has to do with its plausibility, which rests mainly upon a shift in meaning for the term moral. Moral commonly carries any one of three ideas. First, we speak of a moral situation. Here moral signifies that something is subject to evaluation from a moral point of view. Second, it is commonly said that such and such a person is a moral man. Quite commonly that means only that he observes the conventional codes of his community. But if, in the third place, I say of an ideal of personality, Jesus for example, that he is a morally good man, I imply a valid norm of goodness. Dewey often employs moral in either of the last two meanings, with major accent upon number two. For instance, "For right is only an abstract name for the multitude of concrete demands in action which others impress upon us, and of which we are obliged, if we would live, to take some account. Its authority is the exigency of their demands, the efficacy of these insistencies."⁸ An example of the third meaning we have already encountered in the previous paragraph on the "enormous differences of better and worse."

About twenty-four centuries ago Plato was dealing with precisely this problem. The ridiculous goal of the logic of naturalistic relativism he caricatured in the following language:

Well, then, justice bears some resemblance to holiness. The reason is that every thing, from some point of view and at the same time, resembles every other thing. White is, in a certain way, like black; hard is like soft, and the most extreme opposites have something in common; even the parts of the face, which we noted a while ago as having different functions, and the one part unlike the other, in some respects resemble each other.⁹

Caricature is not argument; it specializes on exaggeration

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁹ *Prot.*, 331 d. Cf. also *Crat.*, 384 d.

in the interest of the dramatic. Used as a symbol it can be instructive. Here, it seems to me, what is omitted from morality cries aloud by its very silence. Devotees of moral relativism forget that morals ignore that stability within experience which gives change its meaning, and that permanence which makes progress possible. To make change and progress absolute is to talk nonsense, even though that absoluteness is assumed and never openly recognized. That element is brought out in a superb passage in *The Right and the Good* by Sir W. David Ross.

The point is that we can now see clearly that "right" does not mean "ordained by any given society." And it may be doubted whether even primitive man thought that it did. Their thoughts about what in particular was right were to a large extent limited by the customs and sanctions of their race and age. But this is not the same as to say that they thought that "right" just meant "what my race and age ordains." Moral progress has been possible just because there have been men, in all ages who have seen the difference and practised, or at least preached a morality in some respects higher than that of their race and age. And even the supporters of the lower morality held, we may suspect, that their laws and customs were in accordance with a "right" other than themselves. "It is the custom" has been accompanied by the "custom is right," or "the custom is ordained by some one who has the right to command."¹⁰

We are standing, then, at the foot of a ladder with three unequal divisions. In the lower and longer section the rounds denote the ascending step of *morals*. The middle comes next, in both quantity and quality. Its name is *morality*. Before these two can be made fully explicit and carefully distinguished, the last section of moral philosophy or *ethical theory* must do its critical work. A ladder brings together its mutually supporting parts. It does its work on behalf of an upward reach. Just so do morals, morality, and a critical ethics mutually constitute each other. At every step of the ascent, clear-headedness is one of the indispensables.

¹⁰ Page 12.

Morality Is Social

REGARDING the Bible as a source book on a developing moral experience does not imply an exclusive approach. For certain good reasons, we have seen that to view the Bible in this light might prove a tremendous asset to Christianity today. The way is left open for any other approach to the study of the Scriptures which holds promise of enriching the spiritual life.

I. THE HUMAN SIDE OF MORALITY

Heretofore when men with an interest in the moral life have looked to the Bible, too many have entertained the view that here a final guide to moral living is explicitly found. Its codes have been taken as an adequate guide for conduct. As our discussion moves on, additional grounds will appear for seeing that such is not the case. That evidence, it seems to me, can be presented to better advantage in connection with specific problems. For instance, in the last chapter it was suggested that the Bible resembles a marching expedition or journey. There are two sides to any adequate description of it. There is a human and a divine side to this adventure toward the promised land of moral maturity for all sons of the best life possible. For certain purposes the human side might be theoretically abstracted from its total context. Thus regarded as an independent human venture, the story of morals might be presented as the total picture. That is a familiar approach in our time. In fact, however, only a lesser part of morality would be included in such a setting of the moral problem. Morality includes morals, and much else beside.

A truncated view of morality is much alive in our era of the social sciences. Morality means social adjustment, nothing more. On first thought, our suggestion about a new use for the Bible might be confused with these current naturalistic

concepts of morality. On the one hand, the Bible presents a picture of changing *mores* of the group. Here is found a panorama on a developing moral life. This side deals with an important segment of the truth about morality. On the other hand, this human adventure is carried on within a certain cosmic framework. These more permanent conditions we have for the time designated as the divine side. It is an approach which concentrates attention upon those objective principles in terms of which moral stability and progress are possible. That side is omitted or somehow explained away in all relativistic theories of morals. It is high time that all who are interested in the morally good life should be forewarned about possible confusions in interpreting the facts of the moral life. No classification of facts is ever as simple as the classification makes them appear. Entity facts are artifacts, made by the process of abstraction. Moreover, all facts are selected and interpreted facts. Put together these observations mean that "moral facts," like all other kinds, easily become a subject of faulty interpretation. Morals are the abstracted "human" side of morality.

II. MORALITY SET APART

When we turn to the Bible for illustrative source material on the moral life, an abundance of evidence points toward the social nature of morality. Without doubt the Scriptures present a social morality. Just here we come head on into one of the magic phrases of our time. Morality is social. Our present-day modes of speaking remind us of that so often and in so many ways. Naturally the layman in these matters asks, can this formula be the beginning and the climax of all moral wisdom?

To the reflective mind it soon becomes evident that such a problem must be taken apart and solved by stages, if at all. There are two direct and sufficient reasons why this is the case. The first one examines what lies back of the prestige

which attends the statement, and the second concentrates upon the meaning of important terms.

Consider, first, the matter of prestige. What essential meanings usually accompany the observation that morality is social? Mainly, the proposition is made so as to evoke a double inference. First, it intends to assert that morality is social in some unique sense that sets morality apart from other essential aspects of experience. Thereupon follows a second implication, that moral standards are actually constituted by this unique setting within social relationships. Neither contention, I think, turns out to be well founded. But that can only be determined as all of the related issues are marshaled before us.

III. MORALITY REDUCED TO MORALS

Obviously very much depends upon the shifting meanings which often accompany statements which anticipate such a setting apart of morality. We will have to be on guard at this point. In one sense, doubtless, the assertion that morality is social means simply to indicate that morality lives most intimately with all the interests of our common welfare. That is undeniably true. Perhaps that very meaning of morality charges it with special responsibility for these interests. Just as the various sciences are charged with definite areas of responsibility, so ethics, the science of morality, finds its specific materials in the values which underlie our common well-being. Where that meaning is intended, there can be little doubt about its pertinence and essential truthfulness. Only let it be carefully noted that such is not the meaning with which we started out. Morality has changed simply from contingency upon tentative interhuman agreements to signify the basal conditions of a common human welfare.

Considerable confused thinking is necessary before these two positions can be merged. To acknowledge the special province of a reflective morality, as charged with responsibility toward the values upon which our common social life

depends, is one thing. No considerable moralist, I suppose, has ever denied that for a moment. A living morality doubtless probes most deeply those concerns which qualitatively distinguish human lives in their togetherness. And yet that idea is very far removed from the two theses under consideration. One maintains that morality stands alone in being socially conditioned; alone, in the special sense that its nature is wholly dependent upon the social milieu in which it operates.¹ The second inference simply reiterates the latter proposition: The dependency of morality constitutes its essential nature as a form of social contract. Hence morality changes to follow the modifications in the social climate. It is a sort of barometer of social agreement.

With that conclusion, the ruse has completed its circuit. Five steps are necessary. The position sets out to recognize the special obligation of morality to probe the nature of those values which condition our best life together. Second, those basic values are then contracted into the social conditions within which the values operate. The life of morality gets identified with its body. Third, moral values are thereby transposed into non-moral values, which are then described and explained by the social sciences. Ethics as an independent study is superfluous, since its basic ideas are already explained by the descriptive social sciences. Fourth, ethics is dependent upon social conditions to a degree that makes its judgments more relative to or dependent upon those conditions than is the case in any other science. Fifth, moral values are essentially constituted by social atmospheric conditions, and so reflect only the shifting climate of group opinion or custom. The major fallacy illustrated by these steps is the movement from a morality that is actually relevant to basal human concerns to one which is manufactured

¹ "If the act is favorable to the existence of that sort of society which the consensus of opinion at the moment regards as desirable, the act is moral," writes P. W. Bridgeman in *The Intelligent Individual and Society*, p. 127.

by the psychological and social conditions with which those concerns are clothed. Morality gets reduced to morals.

IV. REDUCTION UNWARRANTED AND MISLEADING

Of course, morality is social, just as are all other basic disciplines. The sciences, philosophy, art, religion, are social—in many senses. Unless the statement about morality is to be completely redundant, it must intend to set morality apart somehow. Accordingly, much conventional thinking means to convey the idea that morality is radically social, unlike other major aspects of experience in the degree of its dependency. Relevancy to social conditions is transposed into a special kind of contingency. How such a claim can be intelligibly supported has not yet been made clear.

On the contrary, the main contention appears to be unwarranted and misleading. It is unwarranted, since all experience is social, and in many senses. Very naturally morality shares in the social because it is a living part of experience as a living whole. Conscience, for example, develops as an organic part of the whole personality-in-the-making. It participates in a total developing experience, in the give and take of actual situations, which are in fact always "social." The conscience of Jephthah,² for instance, was functioning normally when he sacrificed his daughter in fulfillment of an oath to his god. Like any military leader of his time, he believed that God fought with him in battle. His campaigns were initiated with a religious ceremonial, in which an oath was taken about the outcome of the battle. The fact that his only child danced out to meet him on his return did not change his idea about oath keeping or about human sacrifice. Elation, pride, superstition, ignorance—all united to keep him custom-bound and blind him to a higher way. One custom, good or bad, operates in conjunction with others of its own kind. So "the daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah." That didn't help the

² Judg. XI, 4 ff.

daughter much. It does inject a ray of hope by the human sympathy expressed. That annual ceremonial not only crowns a darkened stupidity. It opens a crevice through which the custom-bound souls of men forced a reconsideration of the right and the good, and gradually sublimated a tragic blindness into the twilight of a new day.

Morality is social in precisely the manifold ways in which all experience constitutes a social enterprise. In that respect morality is not more or less social than the content of other humanistic sciences or of philosophy. At no juncture does morality leap outside the structural framework of experience. Therefore, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, at least one common interpretation of the proposition before us must be held to be a groundless conjecture.

In a similar sense, this reduction of morality to morals is grossly misleading. It is simply untrue that the essential meaning of moral terms is derived from changing social conditions. Social circumstances do in fact alter cases; i.e., a moral judgment reflects all the factors constituent to a concrete moral situation. But that is radically different from holding that the "social" factors which belong to that whole fundamentally constitute the moral values involved. Just as well argue that because man uses his tongue in speaking, the movements of the tongue constitute the essence of speech. Moral meaning reflects but does not derive its nature from the so-called social mode. If the meaning of right action and good character were determined by the more local social context, how could the demand for a better social life arise? On the contrary, morality enters the social situation with constitutive principles, and so the adaptive side of the story forms only the more obvious but less essential part. The idea that morality, like styles in clothing, follows the social pattern conveys a very distorted notion of what is actually taking place.

Concerning these two preliminary theses on the social nature of morality, we have uncovered several important con-

siderations, from which two conclusions follow. First, the socially dependent nature of morality is easily exaggerated. Often that exaggeration means the dissipation of its vital spirit, and, in the end, the complete liquidation of morality. A second conclusion is that the chameleon meanings of social must be explored and held in tow. Social is a term that more often carries a bag of tricks. That shifting constitutes a considerable part of the legerdemain of modern thinking. Our next step will be to follow through on the matter of the meaning of important terms. At this point we resume our second reason for looking askance at magic words on the social nature of morality.

V. TWO PHASES OF MORALITY

We have good reason for thinking that the two principal terms, "morality," and "social" are saturated with manifold ideas. Let us begin on morality. A very common idea is that morality means the customarily approved standards of a group. Morality means morals, and morals describe the *mores* or commonly accepted practices. Historical studies abound in which the customs of various groups are contrasted one with the other. A favorite theme elaborates the differences and peculiarities of Oriental as compared with Western manners. Or, again, a number of well-known recent books discuss the ethics of economic life. With rare exception they set out to describe the development, conflicts and consequences of generally approved procedures in economic affairs. A more appropriate title would be our economic immorality. The general impact of such studies more often tends to fuse two important phases of morality that should be carefully distinguished: namely, approved standards of conduct and those principles upon which moral health and growth depend to the last degree.

Now, description of customary standards and practice undoubtedly constitutes an essential step in facing the moral situation. But ethics as a critical study of morality has never

been content just to make a blueprint, so to speak, of the customs of a people. Ethics means not simply *Ethos*, the habits of individuals or group manners. Ethics studies the standards that men approve as part of a larger perspective. Man is a creature who has learned the meaning of the word "better." He wants a better economic setup, a better understanding of his neighbor, a better political instrument, a better opportunity to develop in body, mind, and spirit. As Socrates was made to say in Plato's *Republic*, he worked at clarifying the distinction between a hand-to-mouth existence and living on a human level, between biotic continuance and living worthily of his human status.

Significantly enough, Aristotle gave prominence to the doctrine of instruments, in which certain indispensables—sufficiency of *material goods*, *leisure* (opportunity for cultural pursuits), and *friends* (normal human relations)—are enumerated as a minimum foundation for a good life. Central in the notion of a good life is the idea of comparative value. Things and activities stand in a relation of higher or lower. They exhibit degree of value, and a value norm. Hence, morality deals basically with that better or higher way of living, not merely with a descriptive account of what is usually done. The older language contrasted what *ought to be* with what is, the ideal with the real. But this manner of statement is misleading on many counts. Chief among them is the false division of moral experience into two separate parts, and then adding an invidious distinction between the so-called real and the ideal. At this second level, morality includes morals as approved standards, but goes on to inject the idea of a valid norm.

VI. CARDINAL ASPECTS

While allowing the descriptive and normative phases of moral evaluation to remain in organic relationship, several helpful distinctions can be emphasized. These salient distinctions help to outline and to clarify cardinal aspects of moral-

ity. First of all, what men approve has a very definite bearing upon both what men actually do and also upon what they ought to do. Ethics therefore rightly begins with what men approve and practice. Habit and custom are therefore one part of the moral life. But a part is never the whole of anything. Besides it is important to examine the relative significance of each part. What comes first in time is not necessarily primary in importance. The whole history of reflective thought on the moral life points toward a very definite priority to the normative aspect of ethics. Men study human conduct in order to discover a better way of living. "Better" here always implicates a rightful norm or standard of value.

A second idea to bear in mind in this connection seeks to relate properly the more psychological factors of approval with respect to the objective-value conditions that constitute the rightness of action or goodness of character. Moral evaluation has an inner intent *and* a characteristic outer form. Approval is concerned with the more formal aspect of moral judgment. The formal attitude of approval, of course, follows rather than prescribes the morally distinctive character of a judgment. Approval may acknowledge the morally good character in an actual situation, or be withheld, intentionally or otherwise. In no case does the approval set up the moral structure. It does not penetrate to the deeper intent involved. That holds true of approval, whether of the individual or the group. Group approval usually strengthens a presumptive belief about the appropriateness of the approval, but does not change the primary moral conditions involved.

In the third place, a very clear idea should be drawn between various aspects of a judgmental process and the object to be considered in that judgment. Accordingly, in any moral situation, the psychological attitude of approval is one thing, the nature of the object concerned is another. I may not for special reasons disapprove of a particular instance of murder. My attitude qualifies a number of elements in the situation, but does not change that phase where the life of a

human being has been intentionally snuffed out. All of the procedures in civilized society accept the *givenness* of the latter element, and that element, not the approving attitude, remains decisive. This principle holds true, and is applied wherever the distinction between degree of guilt is recognized.

Fourth, morality deals with a unitary situation. The complex of elements, including the approving attitude, qualify each other. They refuse to be cut apart, except in tentative abstraction. Our distinction therefore between approval and moral intent does not separate them. They belong together, each organic to the other. Distinctions are necessary. Separation makes misleading artifacts of an organic situation. Entities are fictions. Factors in a moral situation must be allowed to stand in their natural togetherness, without being confused. They must be distinguished, but not separated; organic, but not interfused. Approval and moral intent qualify each other. Approval does not thereby constitute the intent.

In the fifth place, in trying to determine the relative significance of the parts of a moral situation, it seems very natural to common-sense reflection to exalt the personal elements of approval or disapproval. But the psychology of valuation should never be allowed to usurp the intentional structure of the judgment. Here the psychological aspects and the logical intent of a moral judgment become deeply involved with each other. When emotional factors get mixed in our analysis with intentional meaning confusion works overtime, and the right and the good are mistaken simply as reflections of a feeling reaction on the part of the judge. The fraudulent nature of subjectivist theories of moral valuation is generally recognized, but this accent also leads head on into subjectivity. It takes what most thinking people lack to contend seriously that right is whatever I approve, and that the approval makes it so. Such a theory about thinking proves too much. It locates all opinions on the same level, including the theory itself. On that plateau, where opinion

is king and where all difference is obliterated, the notion of making any assertion as true or false becomes nonsensical. The real test, however, comes in discovering the border line instances where proper distinctions are difficult to hold.

Wherefore, and finally, a very good example of misdirected effort is supplied when ethical subjectivity is apparently overcome by appeal to group approval. That ruse is not easily detected. In a roundabout way the attempt simply multiplies opinion, and, principally by appeal to the fallacious principle that probability increases by the multiplication of instances,³ seeks to remedy the defects of subjectivism. Mere multiplication of opinion is irrelevant where the question of validity is concerned. What actually proves advantageous in an appeal to group approval is the circumstance that group approval arrives by a process involving some degree of mutual criticism. In that case, the issue is shifted completely.

Obviously, the essential consideration focuses upon the quality of that criticism, not on the more incidental feature of approval by a group rather than by an individual. Group approval usually operates to confirm or intensify belief, but does nothing to validate the judgment involved. The mutual criticism involved in group approval may therefore supply presumptive evidence, but this again should be recognized as something very different from the believing process. Evidence makes belief more easy or more difficult, but it is not identical with the believing. Evidence promotes logical certainty, while believing may rest solely upon psychological or emotional grounds. Quite commonly the latter is mistaken for the former. Actually then, group approval may take us no farther away from ethical relativity than individual approval. In cases where it does, the grounds for advance are

³ In some quarters the notion is axiomatic that "probability increases with the number and variety of the instances." The notion is false. Scientific experiment, for example, is repeated to check conditions of the experiment, not to increase the probability of the outcome. One experiment is as valid as a thousand, provided it is properly controlled.

not found in the approving attitude, but in the critical judgment employed.

VII. HUMANISM: RESTRICTIVE AND RATIONAL

The second main word in the proposition before us must now be faced more directly. Earlier in the chapter we looked upon social as giving rise to a double-edged theory about the social nature of morality. We found that social in that propositional context tried first to set morality apart from other aspects of experience. Then it proposed that morality is constituted wholly by interhuman relationships. The crux of the situation lies with the weasel character of the term "human." In this connection human acquires a definitely restrictive meaning. That restrictive character in common varieties of humanism is generally overlooked. Let us consider what happens under ordinary circumstances, and how the oversight comes about.

Common-sense analysis of any situation begins with its more obvious features. An event can be dated as to place and time. Then it appears to be connected with other events. Whereupon we look for its causes. Almost immediately the ways in which the situation bears upon our own interests and purposes begin to clarify. We approve or disapprove, more or less violently. In fact, for a time our whole personality seems concentrated within the more immediate situation. Other persons are directly involved. Indeed, their reactions and attitudes soon gain ascendancy and come to dominate the entire picture. Their opposition, or sympathy and helpfulness, engrosses our attention. In short, the human element in any situation absorbs for all practical intent the situation itself. One result is that from the psychological side the *human* factor gets concentrated into a series of dated and provincial events.

All unintentionally a similar restrictive view of the human arises as a by-product of the scientific outlook. Three important elements are at work. The first derives from an attempt

by scientific methodology to eliminate the concentration of attention upon human interest in any event. The sciences seek to describe facts, as we say. They must do so without any regard for our humanistic reactions in respect of their potential significance for us. The first law of scientific method declares for the independence of facts in their natural setting, entirely apart from human valuation. A second factor takes hold just at this point. Out of this avowed purpose comes a demand for a certain logic that can rank as scientific. Historically the answer is given to this demand in the development of an atomistic mathematical mode of thinking. The abstraction is entirely justified as a tentative hold on certain aspects of the broad human situation. But the abstract mathematical logic that, in moments of absent-mindedness, is misused as the only logic of concrete experience gets to be a tool of an altogether different variety. By it human is first shunted to one side as a detached observer of an entity object, and then by later scientific theories man is dumped into the caldron of scientific nature—I had almost added, “to stew in the juice of man’s own forgetfulness.” As a climax to the misapplication of the scientific process the concepts of the sciences are assigned the functions of the categories of philosophy. Thus sciences used as the sole materials of philosophy are pseudo science and the pseudo philosophy of naturalism. Nevertheless, human is either isolated from nature which is the genuinely real, or immersed in an abstract scientific nature. In either case the human signifies what man would be if he lived on a floating island, one completely detached from a meaningful universe.

Alongside such a restrictive humanism stands a rational humanism. It insists upon the ineluctable givenness of actual experience taken in its comprehensive sweep and at its highest reach. No miracles are included in rational humanism. No depreciation of common-sense or scientific theories is involved. Only *four* conditions are laid down. First of all, the abstract character of both common-sense and scientific

theories must be kept in mind. Second, a clear distinction is drawn between the sciences and philosophy, so that they are held, not in separation but as two functions of the human mind as it seeks to understand experience. Third, philosophy is not so much a set of conclusions as a kind of thinking that is at once consistently comprehensive, and appreciative of the value connotation of all experience. Finally, both the sciences and philosophy are human achievements based upon discovery within a cosmic structure, and not an out and out creation. Therefore any theory of the sciences and philosophy must concede that character in the human which makes such discovery possible. The *must*, I take it, comes along with the acknowledgment of the worth of human effort in these directions. Such in outline is what I mean by rational humanism. The filling in of the outline takes in the whole book.

We have so far been concerned for most part with the defects arising from the restrictive factors in humanism, defects associated with the ambiguous nature in propositions about the social nature of morality. We have seen the different meanings writhe and twist in some elusive direction. On this our return to the term social we are free to consider the different senses in which social obtains appropriate emphasis in the moral situation. Ordinarily a proposition as virile as this one has shown itself to be contains a considerable measure of truth. That portion of truth and relevance to actual experiences doubtless is able to carry quite a bundle of faulty opinions. Half-truths live on in spite of their misrepresentative work, and because truth alone is vital. Even so-called vital lies must make some show at regard for the truth.

What, then, are the various respects in which morality is really social? Even a partial answer that we are now attempting will have to be broken into sections. Let us for the time deliberately abstract one part of the question. What are some of the more commonly current meanings assigned to social in

the history of ethical reflection? For illustration we will turn to materials supplied by the Bible. That procedure will advance a very broad purpose in these discussions. Recall that purpose briefly. Christianity as a religion looks in two directions at once. It is a faith in God *and* a good life with men. We stand on the human side of this divine-human relationship. Our grasp of its meaning must be gained, if at all, in our human response to the divine initiative. Among those responses Christianity places special stress upon righteousness as a way of life.⁴ Blessed above all men are the pure in heart, for by that character they commune with the God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Very natural it is, if not inevitable, that a Christian disciple should come to grips with the nature of moral experience. Upon that wrestling and moral achievement, above all else, depends the quality of his spiritual life; yes, his appreciation of the divine gifts which mean life eternal.⁵

From the beginning of human life men have stirred with a moral restlessness. In that restlessness lies the surest empirical road to God. Hence the all-sufficient reason why every man feels at times the urge to probe that restlessness. Hence also the fact that moral reflection has always formed an essential part of human experience. In fact morality becomes increasingly important wherever a man is growing toward maturity. The Hebrew-Jewish-Christian tradition in religion has sought to glorify that moral quest as the heart of religion. Human experience, however, does not begin *in time* at the peak of achievement. Man sets out as a moral child. His steps are halting and uncertain in direction. His moral understanding flickers and develops all sorts of faulty perspectives. But one of the chief glories of human history is the availability of these developmental moral steps for the instruction

⁴ The word *dikaiaosune* in classical Greek translates "justice." Often it assumes the broad connotation of "morality."

⁵ Eternal life, as in the Gospel of John, signifies a superb quality, not a merely endless continuance.

of successive generations. In that succession our part is to become disciples or learners. Biblical narratives will serve as a source book in our adventure. We turn, then, to the question of a moment ago: In what signally important respects is morality social? The next chapter attempts to answer.

Stages in a Social Morality

IN THE Bible we are able to observe pioneers blazing new moral trails for themselves and for all humanity. The work is hard. The beginnings are dark with confusion. Progress is checkered, with setbacks, blind alleys, and hard-won victories. But the record constitutes a rewarding chapter in human achievement. Looking over that record, a point of departure looms up in the social nature of morality. The Bible illustrates the social nature of the moral quest. Naturally, we begin with the comparatively primitive life of nomadic tribes. In their beginnings was not the individual, but the family and the common concerns. Their moral quest was set up as a group affair.

Looking ahead from that point their morality appears to be dominantly social in terms of five headings. In order they may be set down as follows: (1) Morality begins as a social demand; (2) A social-demand morality, cast in Scriptural form, tends to become identified with the will of God; (3) Moral advance parallels social organization; (4) The social good embodies the kingdom of God on earth; (5) Our moral ideas develop on the exigencies of social life. The last thesis carries over into the next chapter.

I. MORALITY BEGINS AS A SOCIAL DEMAND

Consider the meaning of these propositions in the order named. On every hand the Bible record illuminates moral experience, and specifically indicates how morality begins as a group demand. In the beginning of every people were the family, the clan, the tribe, the commune and the state. An individual counted, not as a person having intrinsic worth, but as a unit of strength within a group. Naturally that social unit prescribed for its members. Rarely and then only by degrees was its tyrannical authority questioned. Some

light is thrown on the early tribal morals by an interesting story which came out of the Everglades region in Florida a few years ago. The incident arises out of the *mores* of an Indian tribe. A young woman had formed a friendship with certain white neighbors. One day they all went in swimming in their birthday clothes. In doing that the Indian had violated one of their tribal codes. She was tried before the tribal court and sentenced to banishment in the infested Everglades. The sentence meant certain, if not violent death. She had been betrothed. Her fiancé could do nothing to help her because of other regulations governing his family loyalty. For many years, at the time of a harvest festival, the young man stood on the outskirts of the campfire and cried out his passionate love call.

That story suggests endless chapters on the blindness, and on the spirit of freedom which haunts the human soul. In it are found the basic elements which operate in the destiny of the race. On its darker side, it pours fire over the words, morality is social, when that means the right is identical with custom. But that is the station from which the human enterprise sets out. Morality means *mores* or group manners. The Old Testament Scriptures show definite progress, but never escape altogether from that standpoint. Even the greatest teachers among that company, the eighth-century prophets, do not transcend all limitations of an ethnic morality. Their outlook remained in most respects bounded by nationalistic concepts.

We are interested simply in a descriptive statement, devoid of any element of censure. On the contrary, the leaders who live in the pages of the Old Testament were remarkably effective in extending the horizon and raising the moral level. The achievement appears to be phenomenal when we recall how their work depended upon their close proximity to the contemporary scene. They faced their social situation and pointed up their teaching with respect to it. They talked the language of specifics. More than once the prophets were

told in no uncertain language by their hearers to go home and mind their own business. Obviously the answer was that both their own and Jehovah's business had forced them to thunder denunciation and to summon men to find a higher way. It happens that with respect to actual social situations, and on behalf of group welfare, they declared ethnically colored moral principles. But who cannot see that the ethnic form and color is only the shell of their advancing moral insight? The substance of it was always breaking through contemporary forms. Their insistent protestation that they spoke for God is crowded with significance. Even that point of reference did not erase the last vestige of social demand within the bounds of their own time, because moral insight does not jump outside the framework of experience. It is, however, high time to see that these racial limitations are by no means all of the story. They form one essential part of it, but only one.

In order to see this part more clearly it is necessary to go back to earlier levels. Sometimes one oft-repeated phrase condenses centuries of history. "He did that which is not done," i.e., he violated the codes of his group. Right and wrong express quite directly the group demand upon its members. When the writer in Judges wanted to suggest the last degree of social insecurity he put down the comment on the times: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."¹ Solidarity meant security in that world, so that long ago security found a way of insinuating itself into an important place in morality.

From many angles the lines of evidence converge upon one theme: The group demanded observation of customary modes of behavior, tribal taboos, ritualistic ceremonials. The frequent injunction in Old Testament laws about boiling a kid in its mother's milk goes back to an ancient taboo about the locus of the life spirit. Even the relatively advanced codes in Deuteronomy sensed no incongruity in giving to

¹ Judg. XVII, 6.

a guest or selling to a foreigner for food the carcass of an animal that had died of itself. A Hebrew must not eat of it, because he belonged to a holy people.² Back of this codal authority lie the basic reasons which J. M. P. Smith summarized as follows: "A foreigner has few rights that an Israelite is bound to respect."³ Morals are founded upon a superstitious regard for social authority. The hand of unmeasured cruelty could extend also to a fellow tribesman. "The uncircumcised male . . . shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."⁴ The very incisiveness of the command reveals what appeals to us as a relentless severity. Outside the social unit means beyond the bounds of any humane consideration.

If anything the blindness of group *mores* shows itself even more clearly toward those inside the tribal circle. The privileges and requirements of the earlier sections of the *Torah* were centered upon the male. Women and slaves belonged to the unit by right of birth or conquest, but they did not share a moral status. Their duties were never matched by right claims. The lines of responsibility ran only in one direction: from the master to the subject member. Indeed, strictly speaking the terms duty, right, and responsibility had acquired little moral connotation. It was an age of morals when reflective morality had scarcely begun to function. Women were the property of the master or husband. The head of a household could therefore treat them as a possession, even to selling his own daughters into slavery.⁵ Lot acted in accord with the tribal requirements on hospitality when he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom in order to save his male guests from being molested.⁶ Among the many privileges of rank which the Patriarchs enjoyed, they seem to have taken full advantage of their ability to accumulate

² Deut. XIV, 21.

³ *The Moral Life of The Hebrews*, p. 12.

⁴ Deut. XVII, 13-14.

⁵ Exod. XXI, 7.

⁶ Gen. XIX, 8.

wives.⁷ David and Solomon appear to have managed to inject considerable flexibility into the "marriage" relationship. Legend has it that the latter "had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines."⁸ At least that number does full justice to the imagination of the chronicler.

Although without moral rights of their own, women at the same time carried severe responsibilities, especially toward their masters. This was very emphatically true in matters of sex. A woman by her fertility provided continuity of the kinship group. The levirate laws required a brother to marry the wife of a man who died without offspring.⁹ Polygamy knew only scant limits, and the laws concerning harlotry, rape, and adultery gave full vent to the pride and lust of primitive men.¹⁰ While the man who tired of his wife might dismiss her with a simple gesture, there was no way of escape for a wife from a cruel husband.¹¹ The gesture which for long constituted a "bill of divorcement" should be kept in mind while trying to understand the report on Jesus's attitude toward divorce.

The status of slaves left them devoid of the considerations that in time came to be accorded to a female member of the household. No quasi-human rights were within their reach. They had only duties, tasks. Rights were altogether excluded by requirements. They lived in a sphere of morals, without morality. The one apparent exception was the provision that male slaves should obtain freedom after six years.¹² But that represents an advanced step. It came late. And even then, who among them could press his claim? As for Hebrew female slaves, euphemiously called "maid-servants," their lot was contingent upon the mercy of the merciless male law-maker. Only under very limited conditions could she hope

⁷ Judg. VIII, 30.

⁸ I Kings XI, 3.

⁹ Deut. XXV, 5-10.

¹⁰ Cf. Gen. XXVI, XXXIV, XXXVIII.

¹¹ Deut. XXIV, 1-4.

¹² Exod. XXI, 2.

for freedom. She and her children passed as legal tender in payment of a debt.¹³ The very laws which now and again make a show of mitigating the lot of the Hebrew slave only emphasize the blindness and tyrannical cruelty of these early levels of social morality. One of the earlier law codes provided that if, in beating a slave, an owner killed him outright, he was liable to punishment. But if the wounded slave "continue a day or two" the owner was in the clear, "for he is his money."¹⁴ In the later Deuteronomic code the institution is relieved of a few of its most barbaric elements. Slaves of both sexes might go free in the seventh year. If and when the law was observed, the slave should not be sent away empty.¹⁵ And so across a millennium of Hebrew-Jewish history the institution of slavery casts its mitigating shadow, thanks to a robust developing conscience. Throughout Bible times slavery remains as a morally and legally accredited institution. Morals continued to meet the social demand and morality lingered while awaiting a better opportunity.

The limitations of a social-demand morality are not its most notable feature. They become serious only when the nature of morality is misconstrued. If these Scriptural codes, for example, are falsely regarded as adequate formulations of the conditions of moral health and growth, two serious consequences follow. In the first, men are content to live by a moral insight that embodies only the elementary stages of moral development. To accept that level of morals as authoritative would mean moral retrogression, a return to the ideals of moral childhood. Such an outlook would be a menace to the better elements in our social life, and a handicap to moral growth. Whereas, if these codes are seen as an elementary attempt to discover the moral foundations of living, they can be used to throw light upon the total moral

¹³ II Kings IV, 1, *et al.*

¹⁴ Exod. XXI, 20-21.

¹⁵ Deut. XV, 14.

situation. Their very defects contribute to the improvement of our perspective.

On the other hand, if they are at first mistaken as valid norms, a second series of difficulties may be expected to arise. Not least among these results is the disillusionment which follows the discovery that such a view of morality is untenable. Much more serious is the further suggestion that these codes are *nothing but* a by-product of social development. In which case morality appears to be a derivative form of interhuman working agreements. Morality is nothing but a way of designating the flux of tentative standards which follows the pattern of social adjustment. The end of such a moral relativism means the denial that moral terms have any distinctive meaning.

By this route one moves from a misinterpreted moral authoritarianism to a moral relativism that denies essential meaning to morality. Both types of approach come to an identical ending, after setting out from opposite poles. Whether the point of departure is from a Biblicism which overlooks the process by which moral development takes place, or from a naturalistic relativism which ignores the normative element in moral valuation, they converge upon the same end. In either case the logic of the situation leads to the denial of all morality, in any significant sense of the word. In the meantime both Biblical codes and the social-demand factor in morality are rashly misconstrued. From different points of view, both are taken either as a final edition of truth or as mere flux of opinion.

Something more needs to be said before these issues can be closed. At least that much is suggested by the lurking cynicism in Pascal's famous aphorism: "There is nothing just or unjust which does not change its quality with a change of climate. Three degrees of latitude overturn the whole science of (moral) law." Centuries later the brilliant Macaulay anticipated the theory that morals are a matter of pomp and circumstance.

Every age and every nation has certain characteristic vices, which prevail almost universally, which scarcely any person scruples to avow, and which very rigid moralists but faintly censure. Succeeding generations change the fashion of their morals with the fashion of their hats and their coaches, take some other form of wickedness under their patronage, and wonder at the depravity of their ancestors.

II. A SCRIPTURAL SOCIAL-DEMAND MORALITY

A social-demand morality, cast in its Scriptural context, tends to become identified with the will of God. In fact, that pit fairly yawns to receive the unwary. It has never lacked inhabitants. Plainly the Scriptural code formulations of social morality are an incongruous collection of shreds of racial wisdom, garnered from many sources, over many centuries. That holds true to a lesser degree of the more formal collections such as the priestly codes and Decalogue. All this accumulative process should be regarded as the normal procedure which it actually embodies. As such, it marks the halting steps by which a people climbed out of the pit of nomadic savagery to make progress in the direction of moral maturity. In the more carefully garnered sections such as the Ten Commandments, the Deuteronomic Codes, and the Sermon on the Mount, the social demand aspect recedes, while the sifted insights assume more importance. That means moral progress. It exemplifies fundamental laws in all moral development which illuminate our total outlook, not least by disclosing the costly and perilous adventure in which moral man is still engaged.

The Hebrews carried along a widespread primitive idea which identified the welfare of a people with its god. "Israel, the people of Jehovah; Jehovah, the God of Israel," runs a never-ending refrain. Jehovah's fate was bound up with theirs. He is faithful and just to keep his covenant. Therefore when Jehovah god acquires the status of God, he has a right to command. In their fierce competitive struggle for land Jehovah led them into battle. On occasion he commanded

the utmost cruelty against the rivals of Israel. One limit stood for human sacrifice of the enemy king.¹⁶ Where the common people were concerned, there was less need for being meticulous. Revenge was sweet for a people battling for a foothold among the Canaanites, and so revenge was willed by their god. This providential god, made in the image of a leader's fears and ambitions, could dispose of seventy thousand people without a twinge of conscience.¹⁷ Throughout the account there are intimations that whatever happened, a number of men who "draw the sword" were conveniently included. A later chronicler shows traces of a conscience undergoing revision, where David is made to take the blame, but the unhealthy business of clearing out rivals still goes on.¹⁸

These standards of human relationship were doubtless much in advance of neighboring peoples. Much evidence points in that direction. For instance, as time marched on steps were taken for the elimination of human sacrifice. The moving story of Abraham and Isaac¹⁹ intimates how difficult and how tentative these first steps were. Nevertheless, here is a man who stands on the shoulders of his contemporaries with a clear-cut divinely inspired demand that this stupid devilry come to an abrupt end. Jehovah actually took steps to provide a substitute offering. The Deuteronomic Code gives repeated emphasis to this outlook, and the great prophets seek to erase that stain from the mind of their people.²⁰

When it comes to the spirit of revenge that is another story. Retaliation remains deeply ingrained in the Old Testament mind.²¹ Even in the Psalms reflections occur with disturbing frequency suggesting how oppression and hatred continued to poison the soul. Not a few of them reek with the spirit of

¹⁶ I Sam. XV.

¹⁷ I Sam. XXIV, 15.

¹⁸ I Chron. XXI, 17.

¹⁹ Gen. XXII.

²⁰ Cf. Micah VI, 1-8.

²¹ Ex. XXI, 23-25.

vengeance.²² For centuries the prophetic voice calling for a higher justice had leavened the Hebrew spirit. Portions of the Law expressly forbade the holding of a grudge or taking vengeance against one's own people.²³ Some of the prophets had discovered, and even glorified, the spirit of conciliation. It was a far cry to where an Israelite could share his privileged place with the military oppressor who rode roughshod time and again over his prostrate people.²⁴ Yet by just such magnificence of spirit was the way prepared for the revolutionary attitude of unfailing good will which Jesus brought to life. Bear in mind, however, that he lived in a moral atmosphere decidedly above the social-demand morality reflected in the Old Testament Scriptures. At his level we have passed from one moral world into another.

Surely it is entirely clear that every people entertain the tendency to merge their partial moral insights with the will of God. There are many reasons why such an identification urges its way among us. Nevertheless that course opens up a dangerous business. In the first place, these Scriptural formulations of a social-demand morality are an inconsistent and limited array of working codes. On the first count, according to this view, God is by implication accused of muddleheadedness. God cannot consistently command the law of vengeance, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and also the law of mutual regard. He cannot will a property status for some men, and also the law of reverence for human personality. God cannot teach racial exclusiveness and also regard for the welfare of all the peoples of all the nations as members in one spiritual household. A god who is supremely concerned with righteousness as an equitable relationship between men and also has a meticulous interest in superstitious ceremonials is at war with himself. On the second score a god whose moral concern is chopped up into compartmental segments of human experience is morally immature. Genuine moral princi-

²² Cf. Ps. CXXXVII, 7-9.

²³ Lev. XIX, 17-18.

²⁴ Isa. XVIII, 7.

ples are universal both extensively and intensively, or they are nothing. A tribal god is chiefly a mirror of the local interests of a particular group. Just as the principle of justice cannot contradict itself, so it cannot be constricted by the bounds of special localized interests.

In the second place, any attempt to identify the divine will with the elementary and morally immature insights of the Hebrew-Jewish codes convicts itself of a vicious provincialism. That point of view fails utterly to understand the developmental character of moral experience. Its interpretation slanders the writers of these codes through misrepresentation. Neglecting altogether the human conditionedness of divine revelation, adherents of this outlook portray the Scriptural writers as pretending to be divinely certified spokesmen for the Most High. Properly understood, they make no such pretentious claim. Within the limitations of their age they sought to bring forth the best light vouchsafed to them. It was a candle which they held in their hand. No censure attaches to that circumstance, nor to their limited understanding of the light which they carried. It is manifestly unfair to charge them with the implicit claim that they conveyed perfectly the will of God. To do so not only misrepresents the spokesmen, but makes God an immoral monstrosity. Surely there is a limit to which a misguided religious enthusiasm can carry a person of ordinary sanity.

In the third place, any viewpoint which ignores the developmental character of moral experience and makes all Scriptural codes equally the will of God, ends by repudiating both morality and the Christian God altogether. If one holds that these inconsistent and more or less provincial moral codes are equally divine in origin and therefore equally valid, he attempts irrational steps. First, truth is made to contradict itself by boxing together contradictory codes. Second, the idea of value or scale is eliminated from morality. Since moral value inevitably signifies higher and lower, or levels of value, morality goes with the abandonment of scale. To deny

degree of value means a denial of moral value itself. Finally, if moral distinctions are derivatives, and not irreducible values, one cannot convey essential meaning when he speaks of a righteous God. The whole Hebrew-Christian standpoint makes capital of the ultimate validity of moral distinctions. God is moral in character, or He is nothing. From these considerations it is plain that a social-demand morality, when pressed in this direction, ends in complete self-stultification.

Wherever the will of God is assimilated to a growing moral tradition or to the conventions of any particular age or people, both morality and religion are dishonored. On one hand, the right gets identified with the customary; on the other, religion externalizes itself through customary observances, such as ceremonials on sacrifice, sacred seasons, sabbath regulations, and the interpretations of cultus requirements. In time morals and religion are hopelessly confused. Legal sections of the Old Testament Scriptures, such as the Levitical and Holiness codes are singularly devoid of enlightened moral perspective. Even prophetic writers remain entangled with a certain degree of moral obtuseness, where the ritualistic and the moral stand on the same level. Ezekiel lumped together the eating of improperly prepared food, idol worship, murder, and adultery as co-ordinate parts of one divine judgment.²⁵

In the main, however, the prophets leave no doubt about the resultant arrested development in contemporaneous religion, and how far short of moral requirements it was content to perpetuate its formalities. Against this background are heard the thundering denunciation of the Jeremiahs, Isaiahs, and the spiritual sons of an Amos or a Micah. Centuries later this insidious drag on moral exploration is exposed by the great prophet of Nazareth. One reading of Mark VII will present ample evidence for realizing how the uncritical alliance of social codes with the will of God devastates the human soul. Throughout his ministry Jesus blasted away at blind religious fanaticism which most effectively inculcates

²⁵ Ezek. XXXIII, 24-25.

the worst form of moral dullness and inertia. In this way a combination of custom and prejudice is sanctified by religion.

It is an old story that is ever new. Like a scourge across Hebrew-Christian history lies the too frequent identification of God's will with very human traditions about that will. With all our advantages our ability to move away from that kind of blasphemous stupidity lags far behind. Its persistence marks our spiritual immaturity and smears the Christian ideal with a devastating scandal. This perverse interpretation of moral experience constitutes a modern form of idolatry. It raises fragmentary human insight to the level of final truth, and so makes God in the image of human inertia and conceit. The reasons why this travesty on divine goodness continues to be perpetrated lie all about us. It is better not to enumerate them, but to let them die of neglect.

III. A PARALLEL OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Moral advance parallels social organization. Modern students of moral development observe this correlation and underscore it as a flash from high places. That correlation is, indeed, suggestive. It opens a window of light. What meanings are tucked away in it? At least two of them appear whenever this thesis is considered with care. First, there is the historical theory among the Hebrews that basic social changes are directed by Jehovah god. Second, *in an ambiguous sense*, a parallel arises between moral advance and social organization. The precise nature of that correlation constitutes another distinct problem.

On the first approach to the problem the way is relatively clear. Throughout most of their history the Hebrew people are definitely a covenant people. Since the nominal authority of their god was complete, his will therefore guarantees the morally correct procedure. Tradition has it that Israel and Yahweh had set up their mutual allegiance at the time of the

Exodus from Egypt.²⁶ Thereafter their mode of social organization was directed by Jehovah. Special attention is given to the dramatic infiltration process of approximately four centuries whereby they established a home in Palestine; to the long-drawn-out policy of ethnic exclusiveness and isolation from the customs of their adopted land; to the steps which led to the establishing of the Davidic monarchy about 1000 B.C.; to the tragic exile periods some four hundred years later when their leaders were deported to foreign parts as part of the Babylonian conquest policy; to the magnificent gestures toward a restoration of a national life centering in Jerusalem. In each new social situation divine supervision assured moral guidance. Closely parallel to the manner of their social organization a moral code was worked out in terms of concrete needs, under the idea of divine guidance.

A second decisive element enters the picture by reason of the nominal acceptance of the ideal of a theocratic society, together with attempts to explain the more intermediate agencies of events. Formally at least the first thesis stood: God is at work in history. Bluntly stated this meant that what happens in the crises of a nation's life is the will of God, and is therefore morally justified. No, said the first crop of scoffers in the post-exilic period. Whereupon various leaders sought "to justify the ways of God to man." Thus was opened up a new road, the whole enterprise of explanation of events in terms of what is sometimes called secondary causes. Just how do crises arise? What factors are at work in their resolution? How are new adjustments worked out? Questions of this general nature are bound to keep coming up. And they in turn dig up others of their kin. Chief among them concerns the issue of what constitutes explanation. Just when has an event been explained? At first explanation seems simple enough. In situations of this kind, it usually consists in tracing the continuity of social events.

The story of continuity centers most generally about a

²⁶ See Exod. VI, 2-3; Josh. XXIV, 14; Hos. XII, 9; Jer. II, 1-2; Ezek. XX, 5.

widely publicized theme about God in the social process. However, the primitive Hebrew theory of direct and immediate divine agency, where a god carried out his arbitrary will or responded with mechanical efficiency to the prayers of a suppliant, is too simple to be true. It ignores too many considerations, about God, about human welfare, and about a rational world order. Besides, as Comte so effectively taught the modern mind, to explain an event by saying God did it, at best is only a partial explanation or none at all. We want to know *how* God works. What limitations does he impose upon Himself, as parts of his benevolent purpose? What specific instruments does he employ? What are the laws of their operation? The queries are innumerable and entirely relevant.

As the idea of scientific explanation has expanded through the centuries, it has followed very definite patterns. By far the more influential are two of them. One is the cause and effect ideal which was framed on mathematical reasoning. That one was designed for use on the world of nature. The second pattern of explanation is a curious combination. It carried over very much of the cause-effect theory. Onto this was grafted the incompatible idea of evolution. The third and final ingredient came with the discovery of the social sciences—history, psychology, sociology, political economy. Out of the amalgamation of these elements has developed an ideal of explanation for social phenomena that has far-reaching effects upon the modern mind. Most of them have worked to incalculable advantage. But suppose we look briefly at an influential attempt at applying this second approach to the situation before us.

One version runs about as follows. Ethical monotheism developed out of the tension between the primitive *mishpat*, the codes developed by desert tribes, and the newer customs that had grown up among peoples with a settled habitat. It came to pass through the following means. The Hebrew prophet supported the primitive rules evolved in a hard and

simple desert life. Over against the *mishpat* were the conventions in process of formation under the formative influences of living in their adopted homeland. Hence the prophet arose as a protagonist of social justice in the new situation. The clash was essentially between two types of morals, although the prophet presented his demand in the name of Jehovah god. Without doubt there are large and pertinent truths implicated in these contentions. The trouble lies with the omissions, and with the suggestive inference that a partial explanation is not only complete but constitutes the sole alternative. For instance, are we to infer that social struggles evolve moral principles, and so in this instance created an ethical monotheism? If so, a wholly different theory of morality has been propounded. That idea of morality is, moreover, both a defective and distorted theory.

A social-causation theory is defective in its failure to show how a conflict of two types of custom naturally produces a *higher* moral level. An assumption is made to that effect. The only hint in support of the inference is the initiative and vigor of the prophet occasioned by his distress over a social situation. The question remains just why did a higher justice emerge? Social causation is a distorted theory because it derives the whole moral process from social conflict. That conflict, of course, is a very important phase of the whole process. Throwing light upon that phase makes a valuable contribution to moral and religious theory. But that study is very different from the one which assumes that morality follows the flag of social reconstruction. Morals always do. As a theory of explanation naturalistic reductionism can supply no better example of the fallacy of inverted relation. In it lies the confusing of a co-ordination between moral and social change with a particular causal theory of that co-ordination; one in which an abstract "social" generates an equally abstract "moral." The latter is accurately designated as morals or *mores*, something which is included in morality but not identical with it.

IV. SOCIAL GOOD EMBODIES KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

The social good embodies the Kingdom of God on earth. That proposition meets today with almost universal consent among professing Christians. In that consent lies something of a tribute, and one that follows the trail of much truth. Many different reactions, however, are involved in this general attitude. Doubtless the main reason is that the statement means many things to many people. Our business is to clarify some of its meanings, especially those versions associated with current ideas about the social nature of morality.

In Christian circles one finds a vigorous devotion to a standpoint generally known as the social gospel. Although incautious souls actually succeed at times in bringing discredit upon prophets of the social passion, the idea not only refuses to die, but periodically intensifies its grip upon men. The main theme of a social gospel harks back to the idea that the dominant motive of a man's life should be to contribute toward the founding of an ideal social order. That better social order, couched in a religious setting and in the language of the Jewish reign or Kingdom of God, has usually meant at least one thing: God's will for human relationship should be acknowledged, in order that His justice might prevail toward all men. That ideal commends itself to Christian men throughout the world. When questions are raised about what that divine justice means, to what extent and how it is to be applied, our brotherly love seems to cease functioning.

Back of the kingdom ideal lie several influences of primary importance which must be kept in mind when we try to understand this kingdom preachment. One is *the terrific economic struggle* of the people among whom the ideal was nourished. For unknown centuries the Hebrews were nurtured by the severe customs of nomadic tribes. For approximately four hundred years they maneuvered to obtain a

foothold in Palestine. They succeeded in digging in on the less desirable portions of the rugged hills and plains of that semi-desert land. The economic resources of a loyal Palestinian Jew kept him on the border line required for a very meager subsistence. The pastoral and agricultural life of these people was deeply permeated by the rigid law of their desert inheritance. The abuses of economic power provided ample occasion for conflict, especially as a tribal communism came to be displaced by a territorial landlordism. Evidently as certain Hebrews acquired title to the larger estates the landlord system remained intact. The story of Nabal,²⁷ for instance, suggests a picture of a wealthy landowner, who counted in the locality because of the size of his flocks. That story also illuminates the methods by which some men obtained some of their wealth. It appears there were gangsters in those days to match the landlords. The former also knew how to use strong arm methods in order to exact tribute money from their selected victims. David it appears was such a leader. For the execution of his plans he gathered *gibborim*, or men of valor, about him, with perhaps mercenary troops upon whom he would call in times of emergency. Doubtless these latter men had much to do with discovering the regal capacities of David's son Solomon.

These early narratives supply ample evidence which dictated the predictions of Samuel about their proposed "choice" of a monarchy. A military despot in a poor country can be absolutely ruthless. In an order where man power was cheaper than property, Samuel pointed out how the king would demand compulsory service, and then significantly reiterates:

"And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take a tenth of your

²⁷ I Sam. XXV.

seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. And he will take the tenth of your flocks: and ye shall be his servants."²⁸

To all appearances Samuel knew whereof he spoke. Solomon's building projects, including the temple, utilized the advantages of forced labor.²⁹ So great were the economic burdens of the people that the land continually seethed with much discontent. A rapid succession of kings was one way to discover a leader able to hold revolution in tow. In the more prosperous northern kingdom the benefits of trade accumulated to create the conditions about which the prophet Amos spoke so acridly.³⁰ The small farmer was not only threatened with destitution and foreclosure, but it was legally possible for him and his family to be enslaved in payment of a debt. The story about the prophet Elisha manifolding the widow's supply of oil reflects such a prospect for her two sons.³¹ Wedged in between a niggardly poor soil and the rapacity of an ever more powerful ruling class, it is small wonder that a Messianic hope of a better day was steadily rising, and burned ever more brightly as the plight of the people became more desperate. The fact that the ruler was often a foreign conqueror made this economic slavery more galling. Through many centuries such was life with the common people in Palestine.

Both in spite of these intolerable conditions and in conjunction with them, *the Jewish people achieved a remarkable degree of moral growth*. From our vantage ground the persistence of a spirit of vengeance seems shocking enough. The prophet Joel, for example, holding in mind the bitter humili-

²⁸ I Sam. VIII, 14-17.

²⁹ I Kings V, 13-16.

³⁰ Amos VIII, *et al.*

³¹ II Kings IV, 1 ff.

ations of the Persian domination, reversed the famous prophetic vision of a Micah and an Isaiah: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears,"³² he cried. As the gangrene of hatred spread, his poisoned hope became a cry for revenge. "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the children of Judah."³³ Entirely too much of this temper lived on in their temple chants, the psalms.

The remarkable thing, however, is their gradual triumph over these reactions and their phenomenal growth of moral insight. Much of the Old Testament had accepted the defective principle which held that goodness means piety, and piety guarantees prosperity; conversely, poverty and adversity come as a punishment for sin. The book of Job culminates many a costly revision in perspective. With unforgettable confidence Job protests his innocence. "Though he slay me, yet will I have my say out . . . for I know that my vindicator liveth, and that he shall stand over the dust of my body: and without mine eyes shall I see God on my side." Not much of what was transpiring did he claim to understand, but about one important truth he was confident. Moral goodness is too precious to be translated into an economic equivalent. Something of Job's truth has laid hold on the human mind in successive generations, in spite of the belated scribe who added the postscript of seven verses. At least one man had returned to the cave of befuddled notions.

At length the day came when prophetic minds more clearly perceived the connection between riches, power, prosperity and wrongdoing. Instead of being a visitation of God, poverty is frequently a by-product of injustice. With clearer eye they turned toward a day when the divine laws of justice would remove the flaunting inequalities of wealth and the exploitation of fellow men. In that kingdom of righteousness all men would enjoy the good things of God's good earth. On the

³² Joel III, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, 19.

way the spirit of humane consideration would increase in sympathy, and implement itself with deeds of mercy. That was necessary as a transition maker for moral children aspiring to become sons of the diviner order of things. It is no accident that men have immortalized in word and in deed the parable of the Good Samaritan.³⁴ Many of them doubtless do so while overlooking the special accent of the author, in selecting the hero from a despised "dog" race.

With halting steps Jewish-Christian moral insight moved on toward a kingdom transformed by the justice of a perfectly righteous God. To break through the barriers erected by centuries of Jewish exclusiveness and nationalistic faith was a celebrated achievement. The long-drawn struggles between factions within the early church are anticipated in common reactions to the teaching of Jesus. The higher prophetic justice for which he evidently stood was by nature universal in application. That was not so obvious to his hearers. Subsequently the Gospel of *Matthew*, for example, was double-minded on the issue. On the near side, Jesus stands within the *Torah*, assured that, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished."³⁵ Can it be that the comments of Jesus concerning the Canaanitish woman's request are simply a didactic invention?³⁶ Did Jesus regard his mission as restricted to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"? Did he actually introduce the considerations about taking "the children's bread and cast it to the dogs"? The story of the triumphal entry bears every mark of an ethnic pictorial celebration.³⁷

On the far side of the kingdom ideal Jesus is presented also as the Gentile's hope.³⁸ He incurred the wrath of the chief priests and the Pharisees by the parable of the householder

³⁴ Luke X, 25-37.

³⁵ Matt. V, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XV, 21-28.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XXI, 1-11.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 15-21.

who planted a vineyard, and who was compelled to reject the favored husbandmen and give it to men of another nation.³⁹ Jewish patriarchs are denounced, and pagan cities shall fare better in the day of judgment than Israel's pride.⁴⁰ The sons of the kingdom by rightful inheritance shall be cast into outer darkness and their place assigned to the many who come from the east and the west.⁴¹ In the twenty-third chapter the writer waxes so eloquent in his denunciation of certain leaders that many modern Jews regard the section as a late emendation, designed as an especially virulent attack upon their race.

All this memorializes the shift to a universal kingdom, a genuine brotherhood of the nations conditioned by quality of character, a test from which all extraneous discrimination had disappeared. At the end of a capital story, the new principle stands: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."⁴² At the close of the book the words of the great commission ring on, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations. . . ." That acknowledgment of a universal kingdom, founded on righteousness of spirit, makes a fitting climax to what had a beginning in an ancient prophetic demand.⁴³

A third element within this background is *the essential message of Jesus* to his distressed and distracted people. Without trying to deal with the moot questions which stir the mind when this issue is raised, I would like to submit a most suggestive summary for our purpose. It was written as part of an essay on the social gospel by Dean Chester C. McCown.⁴⁴

What message did Jesus proclaim to his distracted nation? To a people that was seething with hatred against its enemies, hesitating

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XXI, 33-46.

⁴⁰ Matt. VIII, 5; XI, 21-24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XII, 50.

⁴³ Cf. Amos I, Isa. XIX, XLII, and XLIX.

⁴⁴ *The Church Looks Ahead*, pp. 168-169.

constantly on the verge of insurrection, he preached the love of one's enemies and nonresistance to unjust attack. To men suffering from economic exploitation and injustice with all of their attendant social ills he proclaimed the values of the simple life and the evils of wealth. To the legalist he claimed the superiority of conscience and common sense. To the ritualist he proclaimed the sole validity of social morality. To the materially minded he preached the supremacy of the spirit. To the poor he proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, in which all conditions would be reversed and all inequalities smoothed away, was just at the door. To the rich he declared that wealth would almost inevitably prevent them finding favor with God and enjoying his reign of righteousness. Only a miracle could save them from his wrath. To all he proclaimed that a loving heavenly Father ruled the world.

Here we obtain a picture of the pointed directness of his teaching, its manifold interests, and unfailing sense for moral relevance. I am assuming that this general interpretation has had wide influence throughout the centuries. Certainly it finds a responsive mood in the sons of our century. It faces squarely with the famous great commandment about love to God and fellow man. To many of us Jesus appears to have set before men the ultimate ideal of a society in which the righteous will of God is by all men spontaneously acknowledged by attitude and in deed. Accordingly the Golden Rule finds almost universal favor. Its requirements appear to be simple enough for all to understand, and to strike at the root of human failure through self-interest. Conversely, the morally good life consists essentially in having the proper regard for others. The kingdom of God embodies all this in its social ideal.

Theoretically, *ideal morality of whatever school appears to include the common good*. Here, then, is a fourth element in our present outlook. That idea operates in reflective thought through the ages. Witness the periodic appearance of some principle that rings the changes on the Golden Rule. Modern ethicists have struggled long with the problem of egoism and altruism, working for most part with a handicap of an inherited egoistic psychology. From Spinoza and the

English Intuitionists on, the honors have gone with some ideal of a common good. Even the naturalistic tradition among the utilitarians wrestles with the principle of distribution. In contradiction to his psychology Bentham announced the principle that "everyone to count for one, and no one to count for more than one." John Stuart Mill really made use of the idea. Sidgwick progressed so far that he assimilated from his opponents the basic principle of rational benevolence. Then, for good measure, he duplicated it by a nominal third principle, that of rational justice.

Bishop Butler, representing the other main branch of ethical development worked out a viewpoint sympathetic with the principal accent among the hedonists. But he did not stop there. He laid great stress on the impartiality of the right, and on virtue as an independent principle. Writers like T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley carried forward this general standpoint to the peak of idealistic ethical thought in the last century. Both of them present strong claims for a common good doctrine. A recent exponent of that same general view reaches the climax of his argument in a section on the good will as social.⁴⁵ The problem is quite frequently conceived in terms of a limited choice: either the good is inward, noncompetitive, and empty or it is an outer, a compromise, and a social value. In Christian thought a solution is generally worked out along two lines. First, the instrumental character of things in relation to persons; second, the idea of a love which involves a voluntary surrender for the sake of others and for the social good.⁴⁶ To what extent these proposals meet the situation is another question. We are trying now to understand the current absorption in the idea of a social interpretation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Finally, something must be said about *the ever-present demand for the reconstruction of our social life*. In this connection our ideas are as a matter of course strongly tintured

⁴⁵ H. J. Paton, *The Good Will*, Book IV.

⁴⁶ See G. F. Barbour, *A Philosophical Study of Christian Ethics*, chap. IV.

with psychological factors. Ever since the industrial revolution in England set out upon the road to mass production in a machine economy, the human side of the situation has demanded more attention. Add to this not only the phenomenal growth of machine productivity but the revolutionary means of communication which has made the whole world one. Actually new and more acute problems have been hatched by changing conditions more rapidly than our social adjustments have enabled us to cope with them. On top of these startling changes the civilized world now confronts international competition for markets, and war as an inevitable part of our present machine economy. But war only reveals in a devastatingly graphic manner the moral-spiritual peril in which humanity now stands. International war is a natural consequence of an accepted philosophy of life, not a willful interposition of demon-possessed anti-social creatures. Given the mounting threats of social destruction, the confronting of social changes for good or for ill constitutes an overwhelming fact that stirs our human nature to its depth. What towers into the obvious are the signs which indicate our inseparable interests and common human destiny. Therefore, if in any tomorrow the kingdom of God ideal is to gear into our human actualities, it must address itself today to the problems of social welfare. The good must be made common, at the peril of degenerating into an all inclusive evil.

In all these contentions about the social nature of morality there are undoubtedly present the truths by which men achieve the freedom of a self-respecting life. Candor leads every person with an inkling of humanitarian concern to foster the upbuilding of this stairway to a better world. The Hebrew-Jewish-Christian religion commands respect by reason of its timely insistence upon a world in which all men are, in principle, the sharers of the goods that constitute an increasingly better level of life. What our religious heritage contends for, on this point, all the sciences and common sense and reason confirm. Since we are members one of another,

and since our basic interests interfuse, various kinds of co-operation become the law toward fullness of the good life. The task is so stupendous and so imperative that we must learn to attack it together. It is plainly wrong to set interest against interest, class against class, whether it is accomplished by practice or by oratory. Our highest good is common, or it is nothing. Reason commands its realization.

Even so, the question still stands, whether the social good embodies *all* the value or the *highest* values of the kingdom of God on earth? A truth, however important, should not transgress the bounds of its appropriate application. Most falsehoods are formed about a truth out of place. Truth and relevance are mutually bound together. Besides, in view of the elusive meanings attached to the term "social," something more needs to be said on behalf of caution. In many significant ways God's will is both social and not social, because it includes both and transcends our best visions of His Kingdom upon earth.

The March of Moral Ideas

ON CLOSER examination it becomes fairly evident that the four theses which we have been considering are not simple and unambiguous propositions. Each of them contains tricky words. Besides, each one is implicated with a whole system of thought. It is now our responsibility to follow through, and if possible raise into clearer view the basal truth which carries forward these four propositions concerning the social nature of morality. Ordinarily we can expect that the quest for that truth would lead us deeper into the logic of moral experience. Plainly no one of these propositions can stand alone. I would venture that each survives because of some paramount truth that lurks deep within them, a truth which is made to wear a disguise. This circumstance is not new. It is not a part of a deliberate plan. Its roots ramble throughout uncritical human experience. We come, then, to our fifth proposition.

I. HOW MORAL IDEAS DEVELOP

Simon-pure falsehoods are scarce. Seldom are they able to walk alone. The reason is that they are a parasitic growth upon some parent truth. The truth for which we seek in these instances I will submit in the following form: *Our moral ideas about the right and the good develop in the exigencies of social life.* Somewhere in this vicinity hovers the parent-truth with which we are now to be concerned. That is reason enough for regarding the Bible as a source book on the moral life. The Scriptures come out of the terrific heat of crucial experiences within a developing culture. To begin with, these people lived intensely, meeting actual situations where Israel's destiny was being hammered out. Then certain far-seeing leaders interpreted the course of events. Almost as an after-thought, and for the sake of those who were following

in the shadow of forward-looking experiences, these spoken interpretations were preserved in writing. In this way the wisdom of one generation was to be made available to another.

We are the readers. Our position can easily mislead us. Our perspective needs to develop next to the creators of the Book. Our situation is not theirs. With them it was first the human adventure engaged in exploring the will of God. God was giving himself, but necessarily in terms of their twilight experiences. Their limitations for receiving the divine initiative have flaunted our expectations. Often they appear to speak blasphemous words. We need to be patient, and understanding. We are in no position to censure them. When disgraceful actions and a cramped spirit are attributed to God, remember they only make Him in the image of their limitations. Jehovah is his name, not the God of Jesus of Nazareth. Let gratitude be expressed continuously for our advantages.

God knows what He is about. Human experience co-implies certain conditions, if experience is to be human. One of them is that God can give the best gifts of life only in terms of an expanding human capacity. Therefore we return again to first considerations. In order of importance, the divine-human venture in actual experience shapes itself in the flow of concrete events of social life. Growth under limitations takes place on the human experience side. Hence our ideas of right and of justice bear all the marks of that process of human growth. Let it be reconsidered. God speaks in the divine framework of human experience, but it is man who hears, and writes interpretations thereof.

II. ILLUSTRATED BY HUMAN SACRIFICE

On every page, therefore, the Bible gives evidence of these processes. For illustration consider that during untold centuries, in common with other peoples, the Hebrews thought of sacrifice as the way to propitiate and secure the favor of

their god. Gifts, they called them. But they were symbols of a bargaining spirit, supported by the idea of a dreadful god. The gifts were of many varieties, ranging from that most desperate and hideous of institutions known as human sacrifice to the meticulous performance of the rites of the cultus.

Against this background such a rebuke as Micah delivers is to be understood.¹ It all centered about the question of how any man could put his life in the perspective of the Divine will. That issue is from everlasting to everlasting; for our times, as well as theirs. "Hear, O ye mountains, Jehovah's controversy, and ye enduring foundations of the earth: for Jehovah hath a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel." What a beginning! About what? About displacing sacrifices and the whole cultus system within which it lived. In its stead he pled for the sacrament of a good life. "What doth Jehovah require of thee?" Burnt offerings of the choicest flocks? An incredible indulgence of a thousand rams? The fantastic dream about ten thousand rivers of oil? Or, returning to the pit from which we have been digged, shall an Israelite in desperation "give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

The answer contains immortal ideas. They are unanswerable. To obey them leads to the highest wisdom. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Along side of them should be considered words from a later century, a specific command of the law, repeated for emphasis.² "There shall not be found with thee anyone that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire. . . ." Triumphs of the spirit like this are not easily achieved. For centuries the flashes of truth strike here and there, piercing the fogs and only gradually changing the climate in which fogs cannot endure. One

¹ Micah VI, 1-8.

² Deut. XVIII, 10, XII, 31; cf. I Kings, XVI, 34.

such shaft of light appears late, in the supplication which posits righteousness as the sole condition of divine approval.³ Naturally it was a righteousness which required much refinement, but measured by the centuries it marked a revolutionary step.

III. IDEAS CONFUSED WITH THE OBJECT

Only the unwary mind would confuse our changing ideas about something with the thing itself. But the fallacy is all too common. In some areas of human experience the principle involved is clearly recognized. Few persons think that the world of physical nature actually changes with the history of man's ideas about nature, beginning with primitive animism and reaching into the "new physics" of ages yet to come. When Copernicus proposed the hypothesis that made the sun the center of our planetary system, rather than the earth, there was great consternation for a time. Now the notion is a commonplace, and marks a revolutionary advance. We see now that only our ideas about the planetary systems are in constant rearrangement. Nature does not revise its course at the suggestion of a stargazer. A similar transformation of attitude holds toward many of the sciences. Human nature is scarcely disorganized according to the fashions of our diverse psychologies. Or, take any knowledge situation. Even the possibility of any fragment of knowing, or of any organized body of knowledge about a particular subject matter called a science, depends upon distinguishing the object or subject matter from our changing ideas about it. Indeed the very *givenness* of the structure of experience must be presupposed before any dependable interpretation becomes possible.

Strange indeed, therefore, that in areas like religion and morals our naïveté should be perpetually revived. All the more strange since in religious circles the distinction between God and our beliefs about him is quite generally recognized.

³ Ps. IV, 1-5.

No one can consistently maintain that the numerous gods talked about in the Scriptures are identical in all respects with the God of perfectly righteous love revealed by Jesus. Christians who seek an intelligent faith prefer the God of Jesus of Nazareth, because the evidence indicates that the God of Jesus constitutes our highest idea about Him.

On the same principle, our thinking should extend to moral ideas. In morals, as everywhere else in experience, we walk the roadway of gradual discovery, mostly in the twilight of superficial opinions. Our ideas about right and wrong, about justice and freedom, develop with the growth of critical intelligence. The Bible shows everywhere such a shift of meaning in moral terms. The right as pictured in the older historical sections such as Judges, or Samuel; or in the legal codes, as in Leviticus or Deuteronomy; or in the prophetic writings; assumes an ascending scale of adequacy that is worked out in the give and take of social experiences. But we should not confuse men's limited ideas about the right with the will of God. Put in another way, we must not identify the righteous will of God with a changing and imperfect human tradition about His will.

IV. CAVALIER NATURALISTS

The temptation to do that very thing is gradually being removed from religious circles by a better understanding of the historical character of the Bible. At the same time the temptation is actually increased many times by social studies in many directions. The chances for being taken in are daily multiplied by liberated souls who have a cavalier method for disposing with the meaning of moral terms by the use of curt phrases about social morality. An earlier naturalism was much more candid, and even more intelligible. Having set out with a materialistic philosophy, built out of Newtonian physics, they located all values in emotional reactions. The new variety of naturalist retains value as a semi-independent category, and then proceeds to as-

sign it a merely utility function and nature. For example, moral value is useful for survival, or economic stability, or social adjustment, or personal integration. By such methods moral value is incoherently retained as a unique concept, while it is reduced into non-moral terms. Moral value is *derived* from its concomitant situation. Morality equals morals. In the name of the social sciences it is pointed out how moral ideas are conditioned by the cultural settings. That statement conveys important meanings. The Oriental and the Westerner, the Hottentot and the cultured European, have very different ideas about the right and the good. Each reflects value conditions peculiar to his own age and location.

No man lives in a vacuum, but in organic relations to his world. Moral ideas are hammered out in the give and take of social life. In this respect they are like all other ideas. All experience is socially conditioned in some sense. Morality is no exception, since it is an integral part of the whole of living. Moral ideas, like all others, are nurtured by a social heritage and look toward fulfilling certain functions within the human enterprise. After all has been said, however, is this construction of morality simply as morals to be taken as a part or the whole truth about the matter?

The crux of this problem centers about what "socially conditioned" means. We have just been saying that moral ideas, like all other ideas, develop as an integral part of experience in its wholeness. That is one kind of social conditionedness. It is part of the story, but not the whole of it. Moral ideas or judgments operate also in critical evaluation of experience, with a view toward finding a better way of living. Plainly the term experience in this connection carries two different meanings. "Experience in its wholeness" and that portion of experience which is evaluated refer to *two* ideas; the latter denotes the more immediate and temporal series of events, the other idea takes experience in its total cosmic context. In forging a higher ideal with respect to a particular

relationship, conscience expresses also a certain notable independence of social conditionedness. Conscience stands within the stream of ongoing experience, and also runs counter to many of its visible elements. When Jesus reversed at so many points the moral-spiritual tradition of his people and of his contemporary world, the *unconditioned* phase of conscience came to light.

There are, of course, interpretations of Jesus which make him a composite figure of the better cultural elements of his world. These interpretations throw valuable side light upon his social relationships. Their failure consists in overlooking the *unconditioned* factors which enabled him to constitute a higher philosophy of life. Underlying such a standpoint is the failure involved in making certain assumptions which define conditionedness, together with a determination to ignore all aspects of experience which do not fit into prescribed molds. The presuppositions of the social sciences constitute such molds, when illegitimately extended to moral value explanation. More attention is required for the presuppositions of our social points of view, because presuppositions are present and function vigorously in working out conclusions.

V. SOCIAL THEORY EXPLANATIONS

Morality-is-social-explanations become more vocal in proportion as they are successful in foisting upon the unwary a meaning of "socially conditioned" which sets morality apart into a separate category. Morality, the contention runs, is nothing but a resultant of the cultural forces within which the individual lives. The horns of the dilemma stand out. Either that kind of absolute conditionedness, or an equally false alternative where conscience is unrelated to its enviroing world. Obviously the latter variety of independence makes conscience an irresponsible jack-in-the-box. Here is the supposed freedom of unrelatedness, the freedom of a completely disorganized mind. Both alternatives are false.

In rejecting the alternative of unrelatedness, reductionistic naturalism presumes to force the acceptance of its opposite: a theory of social determinism. In that case conscience works out its social nature in a resultant sense of being merely a mirror of the more respectable conventional opinion. Right and justice, and all other moral terms, signify no irreducible meaning, because that meaning runs off into scientific theories of aspects of the social situation; they reduce in the end to conventional social approval and disapproval; they are made and unmade by the *mores* of a particular social unit; they are convenient but tentative labels which men apply to conduct and character.

The remarkable feature about this theory of morality is that after developing the proposition that all our ideas are social, it goes on into a self-contradictory extreme with respect to morality. All our thinking goes on in the give and take of social intercourse. Quite literally, all experience is social. Significant ideas, judgments, take form within the milieu of experience, and nowhere else. But the very circumstance that morality is singled out as social betrays a hidden purpose. That purpose obtains expression in the manifold fallacies of ethical relativism. The difficulty arises in trying to prove too much. If right and justice are solely what the group approves, then approval becomes the important consideration. But why, on that basis, is one approval better than another? It isn't. Then why urge one set of changes to "improve" conditions? No good reason can be given. That every ethical relativism finds itself in that absurd contradiction is disclosed by the fact that some relative term like adjustment, social equilibrium, social welfare, or life, surreptitiously functions as an absolute. Otherwise these advocates would find themselves in the anomalous position of recommending improvement in social relations just where a norm of betterment had been explicitly denied.

It turns out, then, that moral ideas develop in the exigencies of social life, but the growth of moral ideas is only

one aspect of morality. Our ideas make progress toward greater validity in proportion as they follow the clews supplied by objectively given—in that sense non-social—conditions of experience. While admitting the *relevancy* of social conditions, we are logically compelled to deny the thesis of moral *relativity*. Our moral judgments or ideas put on the appearance of following the flag of social approval. Their outer garments assume the fashionable language of the day. What constitutes the living spirit in them, as also the object with which they are concerned, in the last analysis derives from the cosmic framework supplied to human life. That framework is not the handiwork of human willing, for within its structural conditions man lives dependently.

VI. A THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

In that region flourishes the basic truth of all theologically inspired ethics. Moral distinctions, they hold, are ultimately significant, having irreducible meaning. The administration of justice, for example, presupposes two things at least. First, that an irreducible meaning distinguishes justice from injustice; secondly, the moral norm of justice stands above parliaments, above economic privilege, and beyond the reach of military might. Justice in its essential meaning has rightful authority over the life of every rational person. Moreover, that authority is supreme and unconditioned. Human sanity obtains its highest expression in the acknowledgment of such justice. At least that much the Christian religion is trying to say in its doctrine of a righteous God.

However, it is one thing to say that morality derives from the structural framework of the universe or from God, and another thing to rush into an easy formula about morality depending upon religion. Such formulae are usually ambiguous, especially where the nature of the dependence is left unexplored. To begin with, there are many kinds of religion. Terms such as Buddhism, Mohammedism, Judaism, or Christianity, suggest a long list. Within any nominal re-

ligion many levels of development are found. Later ideas do not necessarily mean more developed ideas. Neither should any religion be judged wholly by one phase of its growth. More frequently when the question of dependence of morality upon religion is raised, religion too often means a particular set of theological ideas and morality is comprised by morals. Thereby both religion and morality are partly misrepresented. The mention of these factors is enough to suggest the amount of caution that needs to be taken in the presence of facile phrases about the dependence of morality upon religion. Copernican revolutions can and do take place, not in the rearrangement of the heavens but in the shifting perspective of men. That principle applies to ideas about any part of experience, morality and religion included. The question of their relationship cannot be determined by the usual assumption of a one-way dependence of morality upon religion.

VII. INTERDEPENDENCE OF MORALITY WITH RELIGION

We are now in a position which enables us to understand in part the tragic attitude of so many Christian leaders toward ethical theory. It is at once an attitude of disparagement and of oversimplified solutions. On one hand, "Morality is not enough." To which the answer is now forthcoming that much of what goes under the name of morality is not enough, principally because it is not morality. We have seen also how religionists and reductionistic naturalists alike come to the same end. They set out from different premises, but arrive at a basic agreement in their view of morality. For the latter, morals make up a self-contradictory standpoint in which morality means the flux of moral ideas. By overlooking the contradiction involved, the result is lauded as a significant achievement. For the religionists, such a morality is a poverty-stricken interpretation of human experience, and is unworthy of much attention. Again, the fact is overlooked that theories of revelation induce just such a conclusion about moral-

ity. In one case, morality is a pawn which reflects the glory of the social sciences; in the other, it is an appendage of respectable theological tradition.

On the other hand, "an adequate ethics must have the support of religion." Not much is said about what is meant by religion. The idea seems to be that where morality is exalted, religion becomes debased. At any rate, theology holds undisputed place as queen of all the sciences. Morality by its very nature is now alleged to be the most dangerous contender for the supremacy of religion. Consequently, whatever the direction of this variety of prejudice, a final assurance rolls out in pontifical tones. "Our lapsed morality is the natural outcome of neglect in religion." Therefore, "Christian ethics can be solidly grounded only on the basis of Christian faith." All this confidence is supported by a silent assumption that, given a sincere and vigorous religious faith, morality will follow as an automatic attachment.

All these dubious conjectures about morality and religion are only a beginning of what makes up this tragic attitude. Part of it evokes pity by reason of its cramped outlook. Part of it is enough to strike terror into the heart of anyone capable of anticipating what dire results such wanton carelessness can bring down upon the peoples of the world. Wherever morality becomes either incidental to the Christian life or a tail on a theological kite, Christianity goes under sentence, not of a merciful death but of a perverted life. And the best evidence of where we stand is that after two thousand years no empirical and systematic study of the moral life of Christians is yet available. I mean simply that no serious study has been made within the Christian church of moral experience *on its own account*.

Part of that anomalous situation is due to the misconceptions of morality current in the modern era. On one hand, Biblicistic and theological approaches to Christian ethics tend to become muddleheaded and ultimately authoritarian. Partly in revolt against these defective sallies, the modern

mind has turned increasingly toward the sciences. With the development of scientific method, attempts to interpret the moral life by the social and psychological sciences are increasingly numerous. In the nature of the case, scientific method is designed to eliminate value from its subject matter. In certain areas of experience that design is in practice impossible, but the intention has been carefully engendered into the ideal of scientific method. As a result where these sciences are employed uncritically moral value is transposed into non-moral terms. Right and justice are translated into the psychological and sociological aspects of moral experience. When viewed as complementary aspects of the problem, these sciences make an invaluable contribution. When they are used to grasp the dominant features of moral experience, the heart of morality is by hypothesis left out. Their methodologies resemble a sieve, through which the lifeblood of morality escapes. Such distortions lend plausibility to, although they do not justify, the inhospitable attitude so widespread in religious circles. More often than not, when it is said that "morality is not enough," genuine morality is not up for consideration.

When the questions arise involving the relationship of morality and religion, the first issue to determine is what is meant by morality and by religion. Both terms are constantly subjected to distortion and even caricature. Very often in considering morality, religious persons allow respectable *mores* or customary standards to merge with the will of God. In this case, a doubtful substitute for morality serves as a basis for a caricature of God. A common reaction to this indefensible position leads to the vicious doctrine that morality is nothing but a changing series of man-made agreements. Some of the more common varieties are found in such maxims as: Justice is the interest of the stronger; God is on the side of the strongest battalions; Morality is a front for economic interest in disguise; In the welfare of moral ideals, morals follow the flag; Honesty is the best policy; He profits

most who serves best; Treat the other fellow as you want to be treated, but do it first; Life is bounded by the struggle for survival; Morality means social welfare; The Golden Rule constitutes the final principle, the essence of all morality.

These quips come really from the cynic's store. From the Christian point of view they disclose our most virile form of atheism. For the relativity of moral values means the futility of characterizing God as righteous love. The two positions are diametrically opposed. Either a God whose nature is perfectly righteous love, or a relativistic theory of moral value. No logical mind can entertain both propositions as true. The eternal question returns: How is an empirical faith in God possible, apart from a critical exploration of moral experience? On one hand social theory explanations of moral experience land in self-contradiction about the nature of morality, and in an atheistic religion. On the other, a theological ethics postulates a non-moral theological frame of reference from which to deduce its morality. Consequently, its religion cannot be Christian, and its moral theory cannot be empirical, i.e., a subject of rational discussion. Our release from such cul-de-sac situations can be accomplished only by turning again to moral experience itself.

The Primacy of Goodness

TIME and again we have met the distinction between morals and morality. Sometimes that distinction looked in the direction of contrast. But that extreme has never been warranted by our study. The appearance of contrast emphasized only the falsity involved in identifying the two, where morality is mistaken to mean whatever has locally attained the status of approval. In common parlance, the moral means the customary.

I. THE INTENSIONAL DIMENSION

As a matter of fact morality includes morals, and all ethical reflection begins with them. What men approve constitutes an immediate psychological fact of vast importance. Moreover, the various processes by which this approval develops and is undermined forms some of the most fascinating chapters in social history. These psychological and social factors constitute inseparable aspects of moral experience, and ethics must make full use of them. Light which comes from such studies will always form a part of living ethical thought.

A point of departure, however, does not make up the whole journey. Come to think of it, the journeying constitutes the central experience, in relation to which both the origin and the destiny obtain their essential meaning. At the very core of the journeying process operates what I shall call its intensional dimension. By this I mean simply a discriminating judgmental process and the moral meanings that come to be apprehended. Suppose, for example, I have come to appreciate the worth of honesty. My appreciation has many sides. I recognize an honesty in speaking and in action as a center about which many emotional attitudes cluster. Concerning these attitudes the politician, the propagandist and the statesman know many things also. Each understands the relative

strength of their appeal, how they may be used in various situations to gain desired concessions. Students of anthropology and history have their special contributions to offer. Their accent shifts to such phases as the social factors in developing ideas about honesty. They know about the survival value which attached to honesty, about its gradual extension in range so as to include the claims of persons outside the tribe or nation. Honesty has also its economic bearing. Its lessons include the feuds which have arisen when some flagrant piece of theft was committed. On the credit side of the ledger stand the benefits which accrue to trustworthy behavior. Indeed, we cling still to the axiom that honesty is the best business policy. It is that, and more.

By all these facets in the situation the moralist is impressed, but not overcome. He surmises that morality penetrates to and includes other kinds of fact also. While using these sciences as windows open to the moral situation, he adds what is distinctively moral. That he finds in the intensional judgment which works at a deeper dimension of the whole integral situation. The dimension in question constitutes a moral judgment, a complex process in which a judgment in value scale that connotes a *better* mode of human life is executed.

II. BIRTH OF CONSCIENCE

Volumes would be required to unfold all that is involved in that distinctive type of judgment. Some of its more obvious meanings might be noted. A moral judgment appraises a moral situation. That situation forms a living whole having many parts. Among those parts are: (1) The conduct and character of normal persons: things obtain moral significance as instruments in the lives of persons; (2) Normal persons are specified, in contradistinction to babies, imbeciles, or persons temporarily incapacitated through illness or old age; (3) The object of moral judgment must be a voluntary action: only that in which the will of a person is projected can be re-

sponsible action, and in so far moral; (4) Every moral judgment takes the form of value perception in which the judging implicates a norm of perfection; (5) Each moral judgment partakes of a critical system of judgments: directly, other moral judgments; indirectly, judgments dealing with the concomitant factors in a total situation; and (6) Moral judgment implicates a theory of reality: moral judgment is part of the whole mind which endeavors to come to grips with the nature of reality as a whole. Ethics involves a metaphysics.

Naturally moral judgment is employed here in a rather inclusive sense. There can be no idea of restricting it to a formal statement about the right and the good, much less to a verbal proposition. A man judges morally in his preferences about those things which bear upon a *better* way of life for himself and for others. Our thoughts, no less than overt actions, influence the quality of life which ensues upon those thoughts and actions. Just here lies one of the main differences between morals and morality. Morals characterize an elementary stage of morality. In them the primary thing is approval. In morality a comprehensive grasp of a total situation is sought. Special accent falls upon the discriminatory judgment by which are weighed the relative degrees of validity in what men approve. Morals are interested in approval, whereas morality seeks a valid norm or standard of the qualitatively highest life possible.

A writer in what has been called an editorial section of *Genesis*¹ has transformed an ancient legend into an illustrious story. The story is not consistent in details, but that need not concern us. Jehovah god had placed Adam and his wife in the garden prepared as their habitation. In the midst of the beautiful and fertile garden Jehovah made to grow "the tree of life also . . . and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Whether the writer intends to specify two trees or one is unclear. At any rate, events hinge about eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One illumi-

¹ II, 4—III, 21.

nating comment has it: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as (gods) God, knowing good and evil." Many purposes appear to mingle in the mind of the writer. What commands his attention most of all is man's unique capacity for moral judgment. Hitherto, that was one of the prerogatives of the gods, measuring their distance from earthly creatures.

Symbolic language says there comes a time in the life of Everyman when he utilizes his divine gift of conscience. That raises his stature, and makes him a human being. Conscience, of course, is not an outright gift; it does not drop from heaven full grown. It is a divine gift in terms of capacity to develop appreciation for a distinct kind of value which we call moral. Instead, therefore, of being a calamity that happened once in the dim long ago, the knowledge of good and evil belongs to the rightful heritage of every normal human personality. Not in a magical flash does conscience come to birth. It shares in the integral growth of the whole self. Once it has arrived, its functioning has timeless significance. In it can be found the measure of man, of his world, the measure of a man's direction and destiny; yes, and the measure of God. That is something which warrants a celebration—the birthday of conscience in every normal son of man. Indeed, no single event can contain all of its meaning, and conscience survives the tons of nonsense talked about its origin, function, and destiny.

III. POLARITY OF MORAL EXPERIENCE

In those integral processes by which the human side of conscience develops toward maturity, ideas and actions, what is sometimes called theory and practice, move along together. Attempts to set one before the other in succession are tentative steps that easily get out of hand. When kept together in their actual settings it is possible to observe a law under which moral activities make progress.

Let us begin with a simple observation of high tension

quality. Moral progress is worked out by a gradual shift of emphasis from outer act toward inner spirit, from the deed toward the agent. That phenomenon appears everywhere in ethical literature. On this point the Scriptures as a whole make an unparalleled contribution. They illuminate the road to an understanding of the struggle by which mankind has achieved an ever higher degree of moral discernment. Incidentally it discloses the incalculable price that has been paid for that achievement. But since the achievement justifies any cost, no ledger has been kept. Some things, when attained, are priceless. A good moral character belongs in that category.

Very naturally primitive moral codes attempt to prescribe actions for members of a group. Group authority is unquestioned and supreme. The individual counts only as a unit of strength within the group. The idea of a morally worthwhile personality tarries with unborn centuries. Attention is riveted upon the more outward deed side of the moral life. The spirit of the agent has not yet come into view. Strange enough the more technical side of what we call scientific method makes a remarkably similar approach. Observation begins with the deed. Control can cope only with the overt act. You cannot arrest the spirit which actuates a man's conduct. Legislation works exclusively from the deed side. The aim of civil law, in implementing moral judgment, prescribes in the main what should not be done.

One of the most important problems of ethical thought has been to develop a perspective adequate to the double nature of moral experience. Begin as we do with the outer deed side, we must go on to a comprehensive perspective in which the inward agent side comes to its own. Therefore growth in ethical insight moves toward the doctrine of the essential inwardness of goodness as the essence of morality. Such a development receives ample illustration in Greek thinking, especially with the great creators of reflective thought known as ethics. In Plato, and to a lesser degree in

Aristotle who wrote the first systematic chapters on ethics, this doctrine of inwardness received a most graphic formulation. A parallel development is found in the Old Testament, culminating with the ethical outlook of Jesus.

IV. SIX STAGES IN HEBREW-JEWISH MORALITY

Let us sketch briefly the Hebrew-Jewish line of moral progress. It is possible to summarize that development under *six* main stages.

First. The earlier stage follows the rule of unrestricted vengeance and of mass responsibility. The two go together. Its terrifying spirit finds words in the rampant song of Deborah and Barak.² Among its savage outbursts is the celebration of the treachery of the wife of Heber the Kenite, who drove a tent pin through the head of a guest. In the same wanton atmosphere belongs the story of Jephthah, the war lord who recklessly vowed to sacrifice whatever first appeared from the door of his home to meet him upon return from a successful foray against the enemy.³ He sacrificed his daughter, an only child. Something of a protest is lodged against this devastating outlook, in the provision for an annual lament for the sacrificed daughter. But vengeance is a hard taskmaster. Its poison spreads to contaminate members of one's own group. Achan violated some of the rules governing booty taking. Joshua turned upon Achan, together with his family and his property. "And all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones . . . and Jehovah turned from the fierceness of his anger."⁴ In time a submerged strain of humaneness leavened this procedure, but the record is long and very dark. That much comes out in the story of Samuel the prophet of Jehovah who ordered total destruction for the Amalekites.⁵ The prophet was later disturbed, not on account of the murder of the women and

² Judg. V.

³ *Ibid.*, XI, 34 ff.

⁴ Josh. VII, 25-26.

⁵ I Sam. XV.

children, but because Saul had allowed some of the booty to be diverted. The law of the land was the simplest and earliest rule of the infamous *Lex Talionis*.

Second. Modifications of the law of retaliation were in time worked out. The steps, however, are slow and checkered. For so many centuries these people had lived by the primitive idea of "breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again."⁶ Even after a spirit of humaneness and common sense had proposed to substitute the payment of indemnity, portions of the law expressly forbids the acceptance of compensation.⁷ David was negotiating with the Gibeonites concerning the death by crucifixion of his potential rivals, the seven sons of Saul. Much is made of the refusal by the Gibeonites to accept payments of silver or gold, in lieu of human sacrifice.⁸ There are several indications that the narrator seeks deftly to mitigate the cruelty of refusing to take a clear step forward. No doubt is left that an open door leading away from retaliation was widely acknowledged, in the principle of payment for damages. The application of the principle of compensation among primitive peoples follows a sliding scale rule, based on distinctions of deed and personages concerned.

Third. The next step forward centered upon the distinction between the act and the intention. That principle has become so deeply embedded in our procedures that it is difficult to recognize the cost of its discovery. Retaliation provided no machinery for bringing a feud to an end. Establishment of the *cities of refuge* implemented the new insight.⁹ The big step began by distinguishing an accident from an intentional act. Provision was made for moving judgment from the scene of action, for investigating the circumstances,

⁶ Lev. XXIV, 20; Exod. XXI, 12; Deut. XIX, 11.

⁷ Num. XXXV, 31, *et al.*

⁸ II Sam. XXI, 1-14.

⁹ Josh. XX, 2 ff. and XXI, 13 ff.; Num. XXXV, 6 ff.; Deut. IV, 41-43; I Chron. VI, 57 f.

and for delegating to a community constituted authority the responsibility for a fair decision. Such steps are the forerunner of our elaborate machinery of civil practice signified by "due process of law." Hitherto, a man's whole personality was telescoped into a single deed, without too much regard for the character of what was done. Despite the tremendous strides taken during thousands of years in applying the distinction between a person and a particular act, the moral goal lies far in advance of our present achievements. In ordinary manner of speaking we talk readily of labor, capital, the criminal. We depersonalize men by identifying them with what they do on occasion. That fact should enhance our appreciation of these first provisions.

A clear-cut distinction is drawn between manslaughter and murder. The distinction is underscored in a context which fully acknowledges the law of retaliation.¹⁰ A very definite attempt is made to appropriate for that distinction all the authority of the law of Moses. One version increases the number of cities, and extends the benefits of refuge to the stranger in the land.¹¹ In the Deuteronomic Code considerable details of circumstance are introduced, and the provisions for investigation and trial "before the congregation" are buttressed with divine authority. Here is one of the most significant mileposts in the development of the idea of justice, the implications of which are still in process of being acknowledged in the legal systems of all civilized peoples.

Fourth. As a complement to an analysis which distinguishes sharply between an accident and an intentional act, the next most distinctive advance came in the establishment of individual responsibility versus mass responsibility. In the beginning of all primitive life was the group. The emergence of an individual from the status of a power unit in a group to an intrinsically worthwhile personality is a most fascinating struggle. It is going on still. Perhaps not until the King-

¹⁰ Exod. XXI; 12-14; Judg. XX, 2-6.

¹¹ Num. XXXV, 10 ff.

dom of God shall come to earth will that transformation be completed. Not until long after the exile did the idea of individual worth and responsibility take serious rootage among the Hebrews. While engaged in the defense of the Lord for the national misfortunes which finally dissolved the nation, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both prophets of individualism, answer the cynics. What do you mean by the proverb concerning sour grapes? The accent is unmistakable. "As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the Father, so also the soul of the Son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."¹²

Centuries earlier an unknown prophet had grappled with the identical principle. In an illuminating theophany¹³ Abraham is represented as contemplating the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Shall God take a blind stroke, making no distinction between the responsibility of individuals? Abraham ventures, to the Lord: "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous in the city . . . that be far from thee . . . shall not the judge of all the earth do right? . . . forty? . . . thirty? . . . twenty? . . . ten?" Yes, even one righteous man makes a difference to God. God's integrity depends upon that. With one seer at least, the principle of individual responsibility had abolished mass justice.

Fifth. A people with a *Torah* tradition honor obedience as the big word in their vocabulary. The word of God has rightful authority over human life. But the divine word is mediated by law codes that accumulated through centuries of experience. The Ten Commandments are no exception. Naturally a tension develops between obedience to the letter of the law and the spirit in which its intentions are observed. The problem is universally human. It forms only another

¹² Ezek. XVIII, 3-4; Jer. XXXI, 29-30.

¹³ Gen. XVIII.

way in which the outer and inner dimensions of the moral life manifest their elemental divergence. Moral growth calls for their complete integration, according to the idea of logical priority.

Temporal priority goes to the outer deed side. Absolute obedience to the law tends to nullify moral agency and responsibility. Moreover, it introduces all the moral obtuseness of a legalism. Still, to divide allegiance entails a doubleness that ends in hypocrisy. Hence for centuries it has been axiomatic with the Hebrews that "to obey is better than sacrifice." The revolutionary changes of the exile experience provided for the monumental idea of Jeremiah.

"Behold, the day is come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; why my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah: But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know Jehovah; for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith Jehovah."¹⁴

In one form this passage raises the ageless battle of law and obedience, of free insight and personal responsibility, of the consequence principle and of purity of heart.

Sixth. Concerning the main direction of the Hebrew-Jewish development there can be little question. The clash

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XXXI, 31-34.

between the *Torah* and the apostles of the inner spirit had long been going on. In the post-exilic period are found many indications of significant victory for the champions of the inner spirit. Jeremiah stands out as one of the fine anticipatory feelers after the clean heart. "O Jerusalem," he cries, "wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thine evil thoughts lodge within thee?"¹⁵ Yet other centuries of growth were needed before the clear-cut cry of the Psalmist was appreciated: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."¹⁶

The long struggle for the enthronement of the inner spirit received its climactic expression in the life and crucifixion of Jesus. His untimely death was arranged by devotees of obedience to proper action, and because he fearlessly insisted that the quality of inner spirit constitutes the very essence of morality. In the Gospels the issue shapes up as a conflict of Jesus with the legalistic *ethos* of the day. There appear to have been six main points of conflict. In that memorable struggle he went beyond every legalism to purity of the heart. These areas of tension I have summarized in another context.¹⁷

To the Jew the Law was much more than a moral code. It was the supreme channel of divine revelation. Now, devotion to such a Law knows only absolute commands.

First among its fruits is a certain blindness wherein man becomes a pawn of laws. Interpretations gradually acquire the sanctity of the Law itself. Obedience to it stands above human values. The result is an intolerable perversion of the moral law. Not inaptly are words like these put into the mouth of Jesus: "The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the gospel of the Kingdom of God is

¹⁵ IV, 14.

¹⁶ Ps. LI.

¹⁷ See my chapter on "Christian Ethics" in *The Church Looks Ahead*, the Macmillan Company, 1933, pp. 147-149.

preached.”¹⁸ Or, one thinks of the familiar words: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.”¹⁹

A *second* consequence of legalism is that it obscured important distinctions between various laws. Jesus takes to task those who observe regulations of tithes, the minutiae of sabbath specifications, to the neglect of “justice, mercy, and faith.” They are indeed blind guides “that strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.”²⁰ More reprehensible is the mind that places murder, bearing false witness, adultery, on a par with matters like eating certain kinds of food. This outlook evoked a revolutionary principle. “Hear me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man.” And there is no uncertainty about the kind of a thing that brings moral contamination.²¹

In the *third* place, in a legalism the moral life may become an affair of conventional adaptation. Exclusive devotion to formal correctness of conduct will reduce morality into a conscious parade before men, and rob it of an objectivity-seeking attitude so indispensable to moral health. At its worst this emphasis fosters professional goodness, the development of false pride, and ends in duplicity. In the heat of controversy Jesus flings at some good legalists these fiery words: “Ye are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”²²

Deeper still is rooted a *fourth* defect—a false simplification of moral experience. Not that all oversimplification is due to legalism, but legalism is its chief ally. The point seems indelibly impressed upon the mind of Jesus. He plies the art

¹⁸ Luke XVI, 16.

¹⁹ Mark II, 27.

²⁰ Matt. XXIII, 24.

²¹ Mark VII, 14 ff.

²² Luke XVI, 15.

of question, repartee, and of parable to shock men out of their pathetic faith that valid moral insights are an obvious affair. On every hand he met this insipid assumption. It plagues humanity still.

In a *fifth* direction lies the inability of legalism to meet concrete and changing conditions, and so every moral code is destined for obsolescence. To be altogether effective legalism requires a standardized agent and a static environment. The scribes and elders who try to meet vital processes with formal prescriptions are pathetic figures. Their work of interpretation is a self-defeating process. The defect is inescapable and incurable.

Finally, a legalistic ethic withers a moral life by cutting its tap root: a personal responsibility for the conscious willing of moral values. Of course, the choice of values is always concretely conditioned. For all that, it is none the less a process of conscious willing. Goodness or badness in character is not an accident; nor is it something thrust upon us by the gods. One's moral life feels the impact of so-called accidental elements, and also factors largely beyond human control. But at its heart experience is ever an active and interpretative process, an organic whole in which no datum remains datum, purely and externally given. Personal responsibility for a conscious choice of values remains one of the indispensable elements in a morally good life. Goodness can never be imposed from without. It comes as the fruit of willed personal commitment.

V. A LANDMARK IN GREEK ETHICAL THOUGHT

In driving toward the idea of the essential inwardness of morality, the New Testament standpoint as a whole makes a most significant contribution. Within the New Testament Jesus stands out as the most distinguished moralist who puts in appearance. If it is true, as some distinguished writers insist, that Paul had more to do with the founding and direction of the Christian movement, the source of Christianity's loss lies in this vicinity. For not only must the deepening of

reflective morality carry the accent of inwardness. More important still is the quality of spirit which gives inwardness a distinctively Christian flavor. There is great need that the spirit of goodness portray the highest way of living, setting it off in contradistinction from all rivals. At this crucial juncture Jesus walks far in advance of the great moralists of history. And at no point does the excellence of his genius disclose itself to such advantage as in his portrayal of the rare quality of a clean heart over against a meticulous obedience to external codes.

If Jesus walks at the head of his own racial succession, he likewise stands in debt to its teachers. In that he shows himself akin to the greatest among moralists of all ages. Already Jesus has been located by our discussion in the line of Hebrew-Jewish prophets. A few more references will help to clarify his kinship with those outside his culture. One naturally turns to the fountainhead of systematic ethical thought—to the Greek line headed by Socrates. Like Jesus, Socrates was paid by his compatriots with a death sentence, and for essentially the same reasons. He sought against their will to raise the questions which would send reflective thought deeper into the facts of moral experience. Like Jesus, Socrates was interested in men, and the most meaningful life for them. Traditions, laws, and institutions were instruments to serve the welfare of persons. If things got in the way of persons, there was no hesitation about the superior rights of personalities. On this count alone the *Dialogues* of Plato rank with the immortal in literature. No line of demarcation between Socrates and Plato can be drawn. It is impossible to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. Plato presumes to begin with Socrates among the conventional moralizers; to give some idea of how Socrates forced the issue between a standpoint of morals and that of a cautiously reflective morality; and finally, to press for answer what he regarded as the central problems in this area—the nature and dependability of moral judgment, the nature of man, and of his highest well-being. For purpose of illustration let us turn briefly to the *Republic*.

Plato is a dramatist who works at moral problems. In the opening scene, Socrates is represented as meeting an old friend, Cephalus. Early in their conversation Socrates comes to the question about the nature of justice or morality. Cephalus represents the proverbial generation and puts the whole truth in a maxim: "Speak the truth, and pay your debts to gods and men." No discussion is wanted or endured by the old man. Cephalus knows about justice. Everybody does.

Plato moves on to a second level of moral opinion, as the father turns over the argument to his son. Strange enough, the son knows all about justice, and what he knows is very different from his father's position. Socrates disposes with the son by quickly convicting him of his ignorance in these greatest of all human concerns. Then a mature proponent of the young man's position comes forward. Thrasymachus has his ideas organized. Morality or justice is an established set of morals. Back of these conventional standards lurk the interests of some minority. Moral standards run counter to a natural self-interest. They are arrived at by compromise, and, being contrary to human nature, are observed only under compulsion.

Glaucon and Adeimantus are young men who are disturbed by what they observe around them. The proverbial morality appears to be too simple and inadequate for the needs of intelligent living. The sophisticated morals advocated by naturalists like Thrasymachus look to them like a perverted version of elemental facts. Whereupon they call for a third and more adequate interpretation. "Tell us, Socrates, what justice or goodness does in the soul of a man, whether seen or unseen by gods or by men." That opens the way for the Platonic thesis to the effect that goodness is a specific quality of spirit. It concerns what you are, not what happens to you. Such is the theme of the unforgettable contrast of the just and the unjust man.²³ Therefore, it is better to endure injustice than to do it.

²³ *Republic* II, 360e ff.

More important still is the disentangling of goodness as a quality of spirit in a man's life from the non-moral benefits that are incident to its expression. By way of emphasis Plato appropriated the myth of Gyges.²⁴ A shepherd found a magic ring. He discovered that when the signet was turned toward the palm of his hand, he became invisible. That meant that he could follow his heart's desire and do just what he wanted, without favor of man or fear of God. The question Plato poses is this: Could you and I trust ourselves with a magic ring? Do we care for goodness for its own sake, apart from rewards or penalties? Are we good enough to live always solely by respect for the values which constitute a Christian character?

VI. GOODNESS GUARANTEES WHAT

Reflective morality keeps driving toward comprehensiveness in dealing with all the facts of the moral life. That driving becomes acute in refusing to stop near the circumference of morality, because the central areas are also a part of the good life. The Old Testament Scriptures as a whole cling to an old externalizing principle which tried to calculate goodness by reading the signs of its accessory benefits. In one sentence, the Old Testament theology stated that so much goodness guarantees that much prosperity. Goodness and prosperity are exactly correlated. Quality of spiritual life seems parallel with material goods. "Blessed is the man that walketh . . . for he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. . . ." "Once I was young and now I am old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken . . ." They were so sure of their principle, that events could hardly speak for themselves. Perplexity sometimes appeared. "My feet had well nigh slipped, for I was envious when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."²⁵ Then he went to church where his attention was taken away from the problem. He solved it by evasion.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 359d f.

²⁵ Ps. LXXIII.

The grain of truth in all this, of course, is that no sound physical, mental, economic, or social life can be established apart from moral integrity. Morality is the health-giving principle in human affairs. But that is very different from an exact correlation of inward spirit with outward form, of goodness with prosperity. The book of Job attacks the cynic who joined with the conventional saint. Said the cynic, does Job or any man serve God for nothing? In his sneer lies the implication that moral integrity as a quality of spirit cannot stand on its own. Spirituality, he wanted all men to infer, draws its lifeblood from prosperity, the substantial values of our natural world order. Job cannot make an adequate reply. He does not understand. More than that, he is terribly perplexed by what is happening. About one thing his certainty never wavers: He is innocent, whatever theory has to say about appearances. "I know that my vindicator liveth. . . ." Over my dust he shall stand, and without my eyes shall I see God on my side. Goodness stands approved of God, though to all appearances it may be flaunted by the world.

The Gospels take up the problem and treat it from many angles. Take, for example, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.²⁶ Workmen came in relays during the day. They all agreed to work for a shilling a day. At the end the paymaster gave to each one the same wage. Those who came earlier complained that this procedure was unfair. That is just what the master-teacher wanted them to notice. He was bent on breaking up in their minds the tit-for-tat correlation of spiritual goods and economic values. That is the illusion of the centuries. Our bias toward the reality of the physical world predisposes the mind to translate the life of the spirit into terms of the physical. Besides, there is a close relationship between the two realms, and this misleads the unwary into seeking a physical equivalent for spiritual realities. We are accustomed to calculate worth in terms of basic physical necessities. Only gradually do we learn to enlarge our metric

²⁶ Matt. XX.

systems. In the parable Jesus evidently tries to expand the vision of his hearers. The kingdom of God is constituted by a superb class of values for which no monetary equivalent can be found. Therefore the kingdom values are a gift, not a wage. They are priceless. Not for a whole world could a man afford to miss them. But no exchange value can be set on them.

Under another form the relative worth of the two aspects of the moral life are set out, together with their essential mutuality.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”²⁷

A brief glance at cross references soon shows how fundamentally that theme stood in the mind of Jesus. In the moral life the two sides are organic. In the end they mutually qualify each other. Deceptive appearances arise, and live their brief and devastating day. Beware of appearances! It is well to watch the fruit, but far more essential and sensible to plant the right kind of tree. After the fruit of overt action has matured, the hour is a little late to wonder why thorns displaced the grapes. You are concerned with fruit. That is important. Then, dig deeper into the situation, and plant the right kind of a tree.

Moral literature abounds in symbolic legends on a final judgment. That is a dramatic form for a fact of stern bearing; namely, every day is judgment day in the very process by which a human soul lives. Each of us is his own subject, judge, and executioner. We judge in the choices we make, and live

²⁷ Matt. VII, 15-18.

under a sentence of our own election. Given, of course, is a cosmic framework, the fundamental conditioning of human life. According to a common interpretation, the final test rests upon the deed—the humanitarian deed—that counts exclusively and decisively: caring for the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned, the naked, and those who are hungry and thirsty. Hunger and thirst, caring for dire human need, are not negligible interests in a semi-desert land, under a nomadic regime. The line between life and death is stretched where small action makes a great difference. All these considerations are important, but not paramount. Dig deeper still, and take the light of the deed with you. The parable presses the principle of inwardness. It turns upon the element of surprise. Both groups were surprised. Those who failed were shocked because they had meticulously sought out the proper deed. They failed because of the quality of spirit which informed their living was dwarfed by virtual neglect. Those who received commendation were equally surprised. Having come into possession of a good spirit, they spontaneously performed the right act. The master-teacher located the vital spot—the quality of spirit that underlies the deed.²⁸

Jesus had not come to repeat the old mistake about prescribing appropriate actions. He penetrated deeper within where agent and act, person and deed, are organic phases of one living whole. Then he capped the centuries of growing wisdom by urging men to obtain the clean heart, the very spirit which betokened their divine sonship. Rules about deeds are molded to suit a set of relevant circumstances. So far, well and good. Moral action takes place in actual situations. Goodness concretes itself in good men, who live not in paradise or a vacuum, but in an environment. Now dig to the foundations in the quality of spirit in a moral agent. Let that spirit achieve goodness, and its vitality will never allow life to become routine obedience in a world of change. New occasions can teach new duties to a sensitive soul, and its goodness

²⁸ Matt., XXV, 31 ff.

will never become irrelevant. The curse of obsolescence never casts its shadow on a good man. Such was the genius of Jesus, the one moralist who said, "Come after me," not simply, "Do these things."²⁹ Doing right spontaneously follows being a good person. Goodness takes precedence over rightness. Righteousness with Jesus has moved from rightness of action over into goodness of character. Goodness guarantees the resources for a higher goodness.

²⁹ Cf. Matt. VII, 21-23.

Educating a Conscience

IN MAKING progress toward a perspective in which goodness of character becomes primary, moral reflection does not neglect the rightness of action. For now the deed becomes not less important, but more so. Deed and character, act and agent, are mutual aspects of a single living whole. Consequently when ethical thinking follows the trail of a particular deed, it discovers not only other and related deeds, but an agency from whence actions arise. Moreover, that agency assumes the character of a self in the making, over which process a discriminating judgment presides. The appropriated name for this personalized judging process is conscience; for conscience, as the compound word indicates, makes judgments of comparative worth about human conduct and character.

I. THE LURE OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Our discussions have sought to clarify the ways in which moral reflection has arrived at the standpoint of conscience. Studies on the moral anabasis of mankind illustrate a movement in one general direction. Moral reflection takes hold on questions about the rightness of the act; the progress of reflection moves on to include the goodness of the agent. Action very naturally stands in the forefront of attention. Men are not only born to action, but they are compelled to it. Act or die, is the first law of primitive life. Rapidly the scenes shift. Act quickly if you want to survive. Act on approval or face the condemnation of your kinsmen. You will be damned if you do, and be cut off if you don't. Act rightly, according to your growing understanding of the moral conditionedness of human life at its best. Tradition will instruct you, and slander when you do not conform. If you persist in steadfastly moving on to a higher level, the "good" people of your

society will prepare for you a cup of hemlock or erect a cross. For later generations new instruments of torture will be invented. History does not repeat itself. Creativity forms the very stuff of human life. Wherefore, action speaks a cogent language in the life of any people.

In the nature of the case, action becomes a fulcrum for control. Custom, codes, and civil laws in succession register attempts to control human affairs. The more primitive the people, the more their hearts are set on control. Group authority is tyrannical and blind to personal welfare. At present we coin new words for it. But they are devilish words, to be looked into. A spirit of greed, envy, and ambition lurks behind their fair sound. What small souls cannot manage, they cannot endure. Yet, they dare not declare themselves. Cramped souls deserve both pity and contempt, and on rare occasions they receive more. In order to avoid appropriate consequences, they aspire to leadership in school, church or state. If that outlet is denied them, they form a league for human uplift.

Most current social control philosophies flourish on two conditions. First, they look backward toward a necessary and helpful frame on which elementary human relationships climb. The child-man learns to walk by the beaten paths. He crosses the bridges which others have built. He climbs the ladders which previous generations have tested. His language, his handicrafts, his fine arts, even his desires and preferences belong to the legacy from his society. Desire lives by what it feeds upon. Human preferences have their conditioning. And if a man combines reasonable cleverness with contempt for humankind, he lives by the ancient art of rhetoric, more recently called propaganda, advertising, or counseling. The main point centers about influencing other people, and manipulating friends—until they find you out. The idea of human control rests, then, upon a perversion of provisional means employed in all normal human development. Its advocates were either born too late, or they are criminaloids,

i.e., human parasites whose activities have not yet been outlawed.

A second basic condition for the arrested development embodied in the ideal of social control lies in a complete disregard for human personalities. Things belong to a controlled order. Persons may rightly be curbed from certain forms of overt violence, but rightly they cannot be controlled. You cannot serve a warrant on the soul of any man, or cast him into prison. Powerful weapons for good and ill have been forged while men's bodies were incarcerated, but that is because their souls could not be apprehended. It is both impossible and morally wrong to try to assume a plenary control over a human personality. If and when any considerable measure of respect obtains, no such attempt will be made. Moral responsibility, that quintessence of human selfhood, simply cannot be forced to abdicate short of its total destruction. In between the years of moral childhood and the discretion of moral maturity instruments for support and guidance must be devised. But they should be used with the greatest of care, out of deep regard for that irreplaceable value core which constitutes human personality. The inwardness of a good life culminates in the discovery of conscience, the guardian of human personality.

II. THROUGH DEED TO AGENT

In the eyes of mature reflection the deed assumes a new importance by reason of its impact upon the moral agent. That impact constitutes a kind of second nature which a man encounters. It may turn out to be quite as much a hindrance as a help, and very likely both at once. It is mediated mainly by four channels. In the first place, at that point group approval impinges upon the self. We meet our neighbor first in a deed. Our first reactions to persons are directed by those specialized expressions known as activities. Actions are the supple instrumentality for personal expression, and the mother tongue of every race. But expression takes place in

a conditioned world where the element of external control ranges widely. That means the first signposts on the road of moral development are found in partially controlled action. Here the problem of authority emerges, for in primitive groups actions are generated within the court of social approval. Since group authority tends to crystallize, its controlling interest gravitates toward obedience by strict conformity. That is one reason why the graves of the prophets dot every land, and also why the children of the persecutors raise monuments in the prophet's honor.

The conservative element in group approval ingratiates itself into commandments, codes, civil laws and military decrees. Additional authority always inheres in a citation, "it is written." Actually, a set of commandments, a collection of codes, are valuable as a trellis to which elementary moral insights may cling. But commandments and codes are not enough. The life of morality uses them, but cannot come to rest in them. Deeper within, where the springs of action find their source in the moral agent, are the issues of a healthy life. Only in the citadel of conscience does a critical morality find renewal of its basal vitality. That is why the concern for goodness of character at length reaches and maintains primacy in ethics.

Even on this inward side a very considerable inertia drags on moral development. It is weighted with impulses destined for surface satisfactions. A little light contents the dweller in caves. Children find what appears to be an inordinate satisfaction in trinkets. Yet what makes the growing much more difficult is the fact that code makers are always calling a halt to the march of moral ideas. Codifiers have uncovered valuable fragments of moral wisdom, and are disposed to settle down with the fragments. Along comes the lawmakers who thrive on condensations of the whole truth about moral experience in somebody's decalogue. These enactments are the second-line fortifications. Wherever the code entails an interest in an especially vital spot in group security, the law

code angles for inclusion in some divine decree. What the Hebrews had learned through centuries about essential human relationships might well be promulgated by the parable of the Mosaic tablets of stone let down out of the heavens. Beyond the mists of historical form lies an assured identity between the will of God and the supreme welfare of men. The rub comes when an imperfect code or something only remotely connected with the highest human welfare, maneuvers itself into the status of divine approval. On this point we have seen how the Scriptural mold for moral commandments tends to press for such identification.

For the reasons already indicated, no Scripture must be allowed to hold such a claim. Our Bible records a hazardous venture and a magnificent moral achievement, culminating not in another Scripture but in a superbly balanced moral personality. Its story begins with a people driven by the imperiousness of bare necessities to life in a semi-desert land, by the elemental impulses of the homeless nomad. But from a life harassed by fear and trusting in the force of might, these people dug their way out of the pit and advanced far enough to pay everlasting tribute to their most illustrious son, by a simple appreciation that calls forth endless admiration. It is worth repeating: the Bible presents a panorama of moral development, not a finalistic set of authoritative commandments. That measure of authority which Scriptures possess arises from the degree of light they throw on the universal moral problem.

In the second place, the follow through of a command morality by way of prescriptions about action does more than provide a tramway for "appropriate" behavior. On its innermost advance it runs counter to a struggling sense of personal responsibility. Here we come upon the central nerve system of conscience. In a moral life personal responsibility cannot abdicate. Moral action means responsible action. Prescribed action backed by external authority constitutes a continual threat to moral growth. Compulsion and responsibility are

the antipodes of moral experience. They flourish in inverse ratio. And since responsibility lies more nearly at the heart of morality the compulsory deed side continually militates in some degree against the moral enterprise. Sophocles long ago showed a keen sense for the climactic importance of this conflict. In the *Antigone* the king had tyrannically forbidden the burial of Antigone's brother. In the name of a higher law she defies the king's order, knowing full well the price of disobedience. Her own sense of responsibility goes into action. It reaches into the nature of things, deeper than the ordinances of the gods. It lays hold on that which constitutes the very order by which they too must live.

It was not Zeus who laid this ordinance on me, nor Justice, housemate of the gods below, by whom these laws were laid down among men. Nor did I deem thy order of such might that thou, a mortal man, shouldst override the unwritten and unshaken laws of gods. For these things are not of today or yesterday, but live forever, and none know whence they sprang. For them I was not minded—not in fear of any man's pride—to pay the penalty among the gods.

No more cogent setting has been given to the irrepressible contradiction between a free conscience and an intractable command. Nor can the authenticity of his claim for the consciousness of moral responsibility be doubted. The vitality of moral experience depends upon its functioning as the body responds to the beating of the heart.

A third line of communication between action and the agent expresses a special kind of mutuality between them. The current alternates. On one hand, the agent requires action as a natural and inevitable expression for life. Goodness lives in expression. Complete introversion or passivity means certain death. Just here is lodged the just complaint about a general will which never gets particularized in deeds. Hell, we are told, on dubious authority, is paved with good intentions. That is very doubtful, for an inactive will could not accomplish even that feat. A down-grade pavement still

required concrete willing. Equally mythical is the saint whose goodness neither leavens the world nor winces under its impact. When you hear of a man who lives above the world, and is indifferent to his surroundings, like Will-o'-the-Mill in Stevenson's story, it is time to set your skepticizer to work. A living moral agent functions, he acts in a world of concrete relationships. Life means willing. Willing entails action. Action in varying degree expresses the self. We are what we do. "By their fruit ye shall know them," provided only that you are a good judge of actions.

Reverse analysis and the apparent results would startle a sphinx. A fourth channel between deed and agent then comes to light. Once you act in full accord with an ineluctable law of life and then you discover that in so doing you forged another link in your destiny. The deed, what is necessary to going on, turns face about to demand that the self rise no higher. In anticipation the deed parades as an angel of light. After actualization it affirms the position of an entrenched master. We do in order to become, and then discover that we become what we do. This anomalous situation escapes us because very often we make-believe that what we have done remains detached from our very self. Sometimes, we would like to think that wishing makes it so. An unworthy deed does not fully represent our approved self. It is comforting to pretend that the real self continues to be free.

The very opposite thesis makes the theme of a famous one-sided chapter on habit by William James. Enough truth undergirds it to make it particularly relevant. According to this philosophy of habit "our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised." The theme is buttressed by many a sound reason, once its assumptions are granted. Its plausibility increases with the vivacity of the author's incomparable exposition. Once selves get reduced to "mere walking bundles of habits" the stage is set for the pathos of a certain drunken character in a play. After each infringement on his resolution to leave the stuff alone, he

excuses himself with a magic word, 'I won't count this time!' To which James tauntingly adds: "Well! he may not count it, and a kind Heaven may not count it; but it is being counted none the less. Down among his nerve-cells and fibres the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes." Through action the self bites into its environing world, and having taken hold on it, is itself apprehended by the world. In this area the tangled problem of freedom springs up.

III. MOTIVE THEORIES

As ethical insight moves beyond group authority and commandments, it focuses more and more upon that center of willing called the self. After all, a group is an abstraction which points out certain basal relationships between persons. Commandments are likewise the projected willing of persons. In other words, the self is a center of active response. Apart from this responsiveness the environing world would be an empty shell, devoid of its present significance. Vegetables become food only for a healthy organism. Tradition *takes* only for a responsive personality, even if tradition is required to explain what form instinctive tendencies assume.

Such organic responsiveness which forms part of the *sine qua non* of morality might profitably be considered under the heading of MOTIVES. Now is the time for all good writers to entertain with fascinating hypotheses about impulse, instinct, and glandular secretions. Ethics, however, may well take up its story at the level of motives, utilizing all the light which illuminates the problems, from whatever source. The eighteenth century utilitarians made a very good beginning. They had discovered the famous ethical principle, that morality centers upon the act, and that the test of rightness lies in its usefulness or fertility in producing consequences. Hence the name, utility or consequence-principle. Straightway the utilitarian was forced to develop a criterion of consequences, but that is another story.

As a corollary of this point of departure, the motive aspect of human conduct was pretty well settled. As the famous exponent, John Stuart Mill, wrote, "utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent." The final phrase marks a concession of the writer to certain vigorous critics. It was, however, a relatively harmless concession in view of the settled framework of this general approach to the whole of morality. But the implicated theory about this *first* motive casts more light on the utilitarians than on the moral situation. Plainly, the theory expresses a geniality for an assumed psychology. In that psychology, ideas are entities in juxtaposition to each other and to other entity feelings called emotions. Now scientific achievement called for an isolation of the intention of an action from the biased feeling which followed upon the action. In which case scientific method, taken over from Newtonian physics, had accomplished the feat of guiding conduct by an abstract intention about *desired* consequences. That is some predicament. For, having carefully excluded the bogey of self-interest by the niceties of scientific procedure, the utilitarians left the back door of desire open where an imaginary self-interest entered in the clever disguise of a quest for happiness.

Most interesting is it to watch the up-to-date logical successors of the utilitarians for a *second* theory of motive. I can only quote briefly from one in this tradition.

The whole concept of motives is in truth extra-psychological. It is an outcome of the attempt of men to influence human action, first that of others, then of a man to influence his own behavior. No sensible person thinks of attributing the acts of an animal or an idiot to a motive. . . . It is absurd to ask what induces a man to activity generally speaking. He is an active being and that is all there is to be said on that score. But when we want to get him to act in this specific way rather than in that, when we want to direct his activity that is to say in a specified channel, then the question of motive is pertinent. A motive is then that ele-

ment in the total complex of a man's activity which, if it can be sufficiently stimulated, will result in an act having specified consequences. . . . A motive does not exist prior to an act and produce it. It is an act *plus* a judgment upon some element of it, the judgment being made in the light of the consequences of the act.¹

Four things stand out in this general view. First, ethical theory has advanced from motive as a feeling tone in an acting agent to motive constructed to fit the idea of control. This central interest arises, of course, from association with a limited ideal of scientific method. Second, "the whole concept of motives" derives from an interest in developing an hypothesis. Being extra-psychological appears to mean that motive is an abstraction of thought without adequate foundation in concrete human nature. The whole idea is not germane to the human individual, except as a practical supposition. Third, the concept of motive constitutes a handle for attempting to manipulate consequences. It is something *imputed* to the moral agent. Finally, this view makes it clear that motive is a post-mortem explanation of some element in an event, the dynamic character of which derives from organic impulse. Accordingly, all in all, motive is but a useful fiction for the moralist who stands apart as an observer. Motive is unknown to the agent as he participates in the role of actual conduct.

Theories of motive multiply in response to a growing sense of the complexity of moral experience. The deeper thought penetrates into the nature of the agent, the more inadequate our common-sense theories appear. That situation brings on a wide-open season. A *third* view of motive follows through on the practically useful theory just considered. Ethics has inherited a whole new family of psychological children. Each in turn undertakes to relieve moral reflection of further obligation. Here it is an impulse psychology that brings forth a new version of motive. Human nature, on this view, draws upon its constitutive elements variously known as instinctive tendencies, impulses and emotions. The human or-

¹ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 119-120.

ganism attempts to satisfy the more urgent desires which come to life as impulse and which meet arresting objects in its environment. Along with interest-desire-satisfactions a quality tone emerges. In time we recognize this quality tone as taste, preference, value. Value may become the center of appropriate action, where appropriate assimilates its meaning from social approvals. Taken as a unit, these manifold functions of organic nature in the individual are commonly called morality. It designates action characterized by a moral quality or value and a conscious pursuit of ends by individuals.

What has become of motives? Let us be empirical. The basal fact in human life is interest, and "the life of motives is continuous with the lower forms of life." Hence, it follows, as the night does the day:

In the decision of all important questions it is again interest that determines; moral claims receive but slight attention; even when they seem to be the deciding element, the real deciding factor is the interest that speaks through the moral claim. Settlements can be effected only when all the interests involved—often only those that are powerful enough to make themselves felt—are accommodated and so adjusted as to make a working compromise possible. . . . Morality, so far as it is strong, derives its strength not from its own nature but from its coincidence with desire and interest.²

So much is claimed to be made abundantly clear by observation. Motives are brought into play by concrete conditions. Consider what happens—

. . . in practice—in the law courts in trying to discover motive to a crime, in ordinary life, in trying to estimate human character, to understand a man's views and actions, to mould opinion, to forecast a man's behaviour. That that is continually being done, and done with a considerable degree of success, shows that motive is not a purely inner, subjective or personal affair, and that if there is difficulty attaching to the gauging of motive that difficulty has another source than its inner or personal nature. We continually explain motive by the circumstances

² B. M. Laing, *A Study in Moral Problems*, p. 23 f.

of a man's life, and we continually seek to discover motives by an investigation of conditions.³

Our author then proceeds to elaborate the thesis that motive is "objective, not subjective, in character."⁴ His discussion does a rather thoroughgoing job of externalizing it, i.e., making motive "ultimately a feature of a situation confronting the individual." Consequently "motives can be inferred from action," because action is understood by reference to the circumstances under which it takes place. Motive it appears is objective in many senses: by being independent of belief about it, by entering constitutively into a stimulus situation, by a reaction that has its source in the situation calling it forth, and finally by being constructed "through an objective situation." Less prominent, though scarcely less formative, in this view are the not altogether consistent assumptions about the exclusive role of the psychological springs of action, the all-inclusive continuity of man with lower forms of life, the universal dominance of interest, the provisional character of motive cut to suit the detached observational standpoint of the moralist. Such an outlook resembles the older utilitarian view in its attempt to minimize motive as an agency in action, but differs from it by trying to transpose motive into elements in an externalized situation where control points definitely toward reconstruction. Laing's view advances with Dewey in seeking explanation in terms of correlated sciences. One prime difference emerges in Laing's attempt to transpose motive into terms of conditions confronting the agent.

Any theory of motive that deserves serious attention must have learned something from the three views just enumerated. In the first place, it is increasingly clear that these views are looking in the right direction by emphasizing the continuity of motive with the biotic elements which form the

³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-179.

base line of human nature. Yet continuity with impulse, for instance, is one thing, and virtual identity is something else. We must not be blinded to actual varieties of continuity or assume that continuity always excludes essential difference. Undoubtedly the verve of impulse spills over onto the life of motive. It operates therefore as an influence, but the extent to which it constitutes the whole of motive is a very different matter.

In the second place, the suggestion that the psychology of motive makes an important contribution is unimpeachable. The moral life is nourished through all the facets of organic life. Among the most important aspects are those which psychology studies. But the psychology of motive and the nature of motive are related as parts to a whole.

In the third place, careful use should be made of the term interest. At an elementary level interest denotes a lively and suggestive relationship of an organism to an object. Beyond that, interest appears in a graduated series of different contexts where it indicates a synthesis of many interests into one dominant tendency. The systematic interrelatedness of interest gives rise to still another meaning. This time interest isolates the worthful quality of an object as an instrument of purpose. Such a connotation approaches what we mean by value. Examples of transformations in the nature of interest are highly suggestive. Motive includes interest in these various senses, but there is abundant evidence which suggests that motive transcends all of them.

A fourth effort, then, attempts to set out that essential core of motive. Motive is the whole dynamic self in quest of a better life, and guided by a discriminating judgment on the values involved. Now, it is plain that while interest is selective to a high degree, ordinary interest differs from the type of judgment in which for sufficient reason certain interests of the organism may be voluntarily denied or completely reformed.

In the fifth place, since motive permeates and includes the

whole self in action, under discriminating judgments, there can be no such thing as a single motive or one that is wholly pure or impure. On the contrary, motives interfuse and are always in process of undergoing transformations. The familiar Hobbesian picture about motive being nothing but the strongest desire, emerging from the pack, like a master-fighter in a dog kennel, is a product of a singularly languid imagination. Of a similar class are the descriptions of pure or single motivations.

Finally, motives are as complicated and as chameleon as the total organic self in the making. They belong essentially to the self, being a living manifestation of it in which, in varying degree, something of the whole self functions. Particularly unconvincing is the attempt to externalize motive, making it primarily a congeries of stimulus conditions confronting the moral agent. As an endeavor to do justice to the close connection that obtains between the self and its environing world, it looks in the right direction. Yet a partial truth parading as the whole verges upon effective lying. Locating motive on the object side of a false separation of the self from its world is one way of bridging a chasm. It would be wiser to recognize the problem as artificial. As it stands the attempt looks like a sortie by a scientist who has entrapped himself in an abstract methodology. Turning the moral self inside out looks more like vivisection than explanation. In sum, motive is one way of designating the activist energies of the total self, related by a unique kind of discernment to its environment and its universe.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY IS PERSONAL

Analysis of motive advances our thought one more step where it comes to closer grips with the nature of conscience. In proportion as the tyranny of social domination is dissolved the self-respecting individual comes to birth. The very mutuality of action and the agent, of deed and the person, serves to accentuate the ascending role of the moral self. Attempts to

externalize that self or minimize it by reductionistic theories of motive are conspicuous failures. Subsequently the march of a reflective morality heads on toward the astounding vitality of the moral self in order to uncover further hallmarks of conscience at work. One such character appears in the fact of personal responsibility. Its centrality in the moral life is manifest under two especially pronounced forms: one negative, and the other positive.

On the negative side one meets the universal phenomenon of the evasion of responsibility. In itself this is a capital acknowledgment that honest thinking sees responsibility as inescapably personal. Convenience in speaking often takes the liberty of talking about social responsibility. Our deference for the splendid achievements of the social sciences encourages that manner of speaking. But on second thought, what more do we mean by social responsibility than the concrete responsibilities of persons to realize in manifold ways the common base for human welfare? Moral responsibility at least means personal responsibility comprehensively realized.

But consider the phenomenon of direct evasion. At first it appears to be every man's game. Legend has it that Adam, the first man, got off to a fair start. When his misdemeanor was detected, he winced under questioning and finally came out with the theory of divided responsibility. Divided responsibility means dissipated responsibility. Adam could only cut it in half, with a sly inference that Jehovah god was implicated. "The woman *thou* gavest me . . ." A dissipated blow cannot fall so hard. Yet in this Adam achieved no notable distinction. His excuse has encountered too much competition from the members of the human race. On a particularly auspicious occasion Jesus stood before a certain Roman governor. Pilate understood the formalities of obtaining from a ruling authority the permission to do away with a prophetic spirit. He might have been honest and forthright in denouncing the perfidy of the enemies of the prisoner. He might have done so, except that he was Pilate. Like

a coward he misjudged the occasion, misplaced his own responsibility in the situation, thinking that by artful banter he could compromise the issues raised. His washing of hands ceremony temporarily concealed from him and from the world the fact that by dodging responsibility Pilate immortalized his shame. The history of the world, said Hegel, is the judgment of the world. In this case history uncovered the emptiness of Pilate's gesture, and wrote him down as a synonym of disgrace.

Apparently no man stands so much alone. Yet, in the presence of moral responsibility that seems literally true. Alongside Pilate was Jesus, and his accusers, and the excited rabble. Surely a man can hide in the crowd! Not from his own deepest self, not from conscience! Jesus sized up his responsibility after another manner. Not immediately, but at long last, some others saw that he was truly wise. Jesus accepted the supreme responsibility to be loyal to his own highest self. He could not betray his best conscience. As for his accusers, it is better to allow a charitable blanket of oblivion to cover their place in history.

With us, the case stands otherwise. While there is hope for our unstable moral equilibrium, the need is to face the situation. In one county in Illinois some years ago a score of men were killed during trouble in a coal-mining field. No legal responsibility was ever fixed. Within a year eighteen more were murdered in the same county. At the close of a series of trials the county prosecutor said: "It is impossible to secure justice in —— county." Again, a father paid a fine of two hundred dollars for the part his son had in a scandal among the high school students. Instead of facing up to his responsibility and asking the son to do the same, the father explained that the seat of the trouble lay with a politician in a neighboring community. He wanted to cast a shadow upon the high school community in order to improve his chances in a forthcoming election. Consider a third example. During the earlier years of the present world economic depression

a London financier committed suicide. His opponent wrote a revealing postscript:

It was a great battle of finance that one of us had to lose. The one to lose was Jimmy. This gamble was his last desperate effort to come back. He was broke two years ago. I and the group of friends who were with me were out to smash the gamble. What a fight it has been! Jimmy White knew I was out to stop him and I knew he was out to stop me. I told people he would be smashed by the end of June and smashed he was to the very day. . . . The game is over. They lost a million pounds among them. Jimmy's party is ruined. One of them lost every penny he had. They are bitter against me now. They blame me for it. But what could I do? It wasn't my fault. I didn't make the rules of this game. Jimmy knew the rules. They are simple enough. . . . It's been a great battle. It's the greatest game in the world, this fighting with millions at stake. I'm not ashamed of my part in it.

Moral health has almost banished where "passing the buck" betokens a sign of cleverness. Really, it is the symptom of a serious moral disease. The road away from this station leads by the forthright acceptance of full moral responsibility. Great moralists of all time have known that. An Old Testament story puts that truth in a most dramatic setting.⁵ David wanted another man's wife. He employed the husband as a special messenger, and sent him to front in a battle to the end. Then David sent for Uriah's wife. Everything was moving on schedule—until the prophet appeared. Nathan told the king a parable about a rich man taking a poor man's pet lamb. David was aroused at the report of such conduct and decreed death for the offender. The prophet closed the incident by pointing his finger with the remark: "Thou art the man!"

A most remarkable parable is attributed to Jesus! Usually it goes under the caption of the Prodigal Son.⁶ One can hardly keep from wondering how a remiss modern conscience

⁵ II Sam. XII. Compare a later and similar story about Elijah and Ahab, I Kings XXI, 1-24.

⁶ Luke XV, 11-32.

would have constructed the story. I surmise, somewhat after the following fashion. The prodigal returned to his home in disgruntled mood, but with a captious spirit. "Dad, let's face this situation together. I'm not to blame for this little escapade. What more could you expect of a fellow running with a gang like I had to? Strange that you or mother couldn't have done a better job in selecting my companions. I was always the goat in the family. Kid brother always was the pet. I just thought I'd do a little turn on my own. It didn't turn out any too well, so what?" The New Testament version bears the marks of a moral genius. The Prodigal returns, brokenhearted, repentant, with all his self-righteousness deflated. His first words were: "Father *I have sinned.*"

Jesus never trifled with profound themes. The only road to moral recovery and health begins with the acceptance of responsibility. There the individual stands absolutely on his own—alone with his total self, with his conscience fully awake. Plato, too, saw this and wrote on a final judgment. Pluto, ruler of the netherworld, complained that judgments on men were not appropriately assigned, according to character. Kronos, father time, agreed to remedy this situation. He made two provisions. One, he took away foreknowledge of the time of judgment. Two, he required each man to stand all by himself. Then the Judge with naked eye peered into the bared soul of the adjudged, as he stood bereft of friends and deprived of reputation, with only character to speak for him. Justice came to earth. Just so, did Dr. Watson in *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* send the returning daughter in to meet her father alone. In the relentless but benevolent light of justice every son of man walks only in the company of his own soul. In the citadel of man-soul dwell two inseparables—conscience and responsibility.

Commonplace moralists picture that companionship ever in somber colors. Spectacular stories seem to cluster about that kind of a selection. It would be nearer the truth to point out that the most characteristic function of a conscience

alive with responsibility achieves a vista dotted with ever more illustrious values. Even though strait is the way to life eternal, it is the road of lasting satisfaction. Difficult is the good, as the Greek proverb had it, but it is by no means distasteful. On the contrary, while the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents, a more profound contentment rests in the mind of the nameless hero of the common road, who walks in the freedom of duties loved and done. Usually we are too much absorbed in entertaining the angels. Those who have dwelt overmuch on sinners on the broad road to hell should remind themselves of the eternal joy of the near saint who builds a diviner society on earth. In that he lives most with himself and nearer to God than all the heavenly hosts. So much is suggested by a contemplation of the character of Jesus and of his disciples through the ages. It is altogether worthy of God that such should be his best dream for His world. The contentment of a morally good character marks the finest flower in the artistry of a responsible conscience. A responsibly alive conscience constitutes the central nervous system of a deepening morality.

V. THEORIES OF ORIGIN

Doubtless the work of conscience achieves its highest distinction in an awareness of responsibility well done. What, then, could be more inappropriate than a doleful or contemptuous wailing about duty? But whatever the mood, all of them unite in a quest for an explanation of the *origin* of conscience. *Four* general answers have been worked out: the intuitionist, socio-empirical, theological, and ontological. *First*, what might be called the common-sense view holds that conscience is a sort of sixth sense, an innate capacity in the human soul. Like seeing and hearing, conscience functions as a part of our natural equipment. From that point on many shades of meaning have developed in an effort to clarify the elementary reflections of common sense. Saint Paul seems to

have entertained such a notion.⁷ While arguing with certain Gentiles about their need for his brand of righteousness, he casts up a theory of conscience in relation to a doctrine of salvation. A fine note of Pauline universality presides over his attack on their smug self-satisfaction. At the beginning he is bearing down with his hearers upon the moral accent in religion. In contrast to the Jews who rely upon instruction by the Law, Gentiles follow, Paul avers, a law of nature, wherein is written the very truth of the revealed law, "their consciences bearing witness therewith."

Eighteenth-century English moralists developed this general view under the name of intuitionism.⁸ Having assumed the deep-seated natural rootage of conscience in human nature, intuitionism became immersed in the task of clarifying its functioning as a mode of knowledge. There was general agreement that moral insight operates with directness and immediacy. How do we make moral judgments? Our human nature is made that way. We have a peculiar moral endowment, a conscience. Its immediate deliverances are absolutely reliable and even necessary; as immediately self-evident as the elemental axioms of geometry, and as eternally necessary as that, in a decimal system of mathematics, twice three equals six. Such innate power is God's gift. Incidentally, ethics in this key was to become as respectably dependable as mathematical science. They did not stop to ask the *why* of mathematical certainty. They might have discovered the fly in the ointment.

On they moved. Next, through what agency does this certainty arrive? In terms of the current simplified psychology, the issue took form about emotion and reason. Straightway the lists were drawn between emotionalists and rationalists. What are sometimes called the moral sense theorists fall in line. The name is unimportant, and it is wiser not to press

⁷ Rom. II, 12-15.

⁸ See a condensed statement in Frank Thilly, *Introduction to Ethics*, chap. II.

too rigidly the classification of a particular writer. Sometimes he favors one side; and again, he bears another label. That feat properly belongs to those engaged in the label-affixing business.

The mathematical sense of kinship or bias of the intuitional standpoint points more directly to the *rationalist* group. Like mathematical truth, moral insight arrives through the operations of reason. Chrysostom, the golden-tongued Christian missionary of the fourth century, asks the heathen about the sources of their laws on murder, marriage, property rights, etc. Did they learn from their fathers? That is no answer. Who taught them? History cannot give a satisfactory answer, because the question transcends history. That is what makes ridiculous a theme in a recent and serious book on the dawn of conscience. History must get started, by a non-historical process. That is where reason gets to be indispensable. "There is in our souls," wrote Pelagius, "a certain natural holiness, as it were, which presides over the citadel of the mind, a judgment of good and evil." His more famous antagonist, Augustine, in non-theological character, sees eye to eye with him. There are "in the natural faculty of judgment certain rules and seeds of virtue, which are both true and incommunicable."

A particularly knotty problem gradually took form. If men possess a universal or natural faculty of conscience, why mistaken moral judgment? Why does conscience ever vary with time, place, and racial tradition? Why does it contradict itself on the same issues? These questions will not down. For the Scholastics they caused no end of trouble, and forced revisions. The Schoolmen made an ingenious reply, anticipating much later distinctions of prime importance. Suppose that I make a judgment on a particular action. In these operations I use the faculty of conscience, *conscientia*, *suneidēsis*. Perhaps that particular judgment is false. If so, I have another timeless faculty called *synderesis* which tells me in general that all wrong is to be shunned, and right obeyed. In short,

the principle which tells me *that* about a moral situation is infallible, but error may creep in on the particular *what* issue. Or again, the distinction looks in the direction of ethics as a science of principles and as an art in applying them. At bottom, the distinction is tentative and cannot be made to carry the burden of responsibility commonly heaped upon it. Considerable caution should be employed in its use, even with so carefully worded formulation of Bonaventura. "For God has endowed us with a twofold righteousness, one for judging correctly, and this is the righteousness of conscience, and one for willing correctly, and that is the righteousness of the *synderesis*, whose function is to warn against (remurmurare) the evil and to prompt to goodness."

In the light of this background English intuitionism took its distinctive emphasis. Two theses ever stand out: First, we may have certain knowledge about the right and the good; second, this is possible, because moral value is as objectively given as any other aspect of human experience. The title of Ralph Cudworth's book is notably characteristic: *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. Unmistakably the stress falls upon the second theme. The problem of moral knowledge was merged with its kindred question about the objectivity of the object of moral judgment. Does moral judgment have a metaphysical basis? Or, do moral distinctions simply represent tentative labels on human agreements? In opposition to the latter Hobbesian contention, the intuitionists answered in the negative. All of their support went to an affirmative answer for the question about dependable moral knowledge. Reason is the instrumentality for discovering those eternally valid principles. Moral truths, like mathematical truth, belong to the sphere of eternal relations, and are apprehended by the same human capacity. And the only response a sensible person can make to such moral apprehension is to act upon it favorably. This contention becomes a basic corollary. "So far as men are conscious of what is right and wrong," wrote Samuel Clarke, "so far they are

under obligation to act accordingly." To do otherwise is to convict oneself of irrationality, and to that extent one surrenders his human status. On this the rationalists stood with the Socratic maxim. As Henry Calderwood put it later, when speaking of the objectivity and authority of reason: "This faculty is a power of sight, making a perception of self-evident truth possible to man; but it contributes nothing to the truth perceived. To this truth itself belongs inherent authority, by which is meant, absolute right to command, not force to constrain."

In general, *emotional* intuitionists share the same background, in opposition to the moral relativism of Thomas Hobbes and emphasizing the metaphysical grounding of moral value. They stayed more closely with the problem of how we may know. Accordingly their interest centers more on the psychological factors in distinction from the rationalists who were concerned with the logical structure of moral experience. Interestingly enough, such an emphasis arose in conjunction with the current prestige of mathematical science. In science the value factor has been temporarily eliminated. Judgments of reason are relentless as the zero blasts, stripping its object of all value appreciation. Reason must be absolutely impartial, a kind of fish-eye stare that catches the unvarying structure of the object. Since that is the case, reason is disqualified as an organon of moral understanding. And since it is self-evident that genuine moral understanding is vouchsafed to us, it must come by way of the emotions.

Actually, we either *feel* or *perceive* the moral quality tone of a situation. We do so immediately, not by the circuitous processes of reasoning. Here is a partition of the way. The more strict emotionalists concentrate upon the various kinds of feelings with which we are naturally endowed. Lord Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson belong to the early part of the eighteenth century. For the former, virtue consists in establishing a proper balance between the "self-affections"

and the "natural, kind, or social affections." Current psychology had bequeathed an artificial problem about egoism and altruism. By means of the *moral sense*, which is a kind of reflective sifter of our affections, we arrive at "a new liking or dislike." Hutcheson pointed out that this moral sensing process differs from the rationalist version of conscience in eschewing general deduction from universal principles, and going on instead to sense "virtue and vice as the eye perceives light and darkness." It took a David Hume, however, to clarify the feelings in opposition to reason. Morality is more properly *felt* than *judged*. With as much finality as his cautious soul would permit, Hume writes, "that this final sentence (on character and conduct) depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species."

In Adam Smith's doctrine of conscience as "the impartial spectator," in Bishop Butler's growing cleavage between pleasure and virtue, and especially in James Martineau's perceptualism, this branch of intuitionism moves to a distinctly higher level. In Butler, conscience of a pronounced rational type found an indefatigable advocate. In an age of reason, where reason was all too narrowly conceived solely as the instrument for scientific precision, Butler dugged into a rewarding analysis of human nature. In that century historic Christianity was contemplating perhaps its greatest transformation of all time, for it was face to face with an ominous demand to become scientific in the cramped sense of eighteenth century rationalism. Butler entered the lists on the deistic controversy, as the most capable mind within the reforming Christian tradition. Many a call had been issued by bishops who knew that "the universal disposition of this age is bent upon a rational religion." Butler placed his main reliance upon the moral argument, and a critical doctrine of conscience which stood at the center of the argument. He met and bested all oncomers. "The whole moral law is as much a matter of revealed command, as positive institutions

are, for the Scriptures enjoin every moral virtue. In this respect they are both upon a level. But the moral law is moreover written upon our hearts, interwoven into our very nature. And this is plain intimation of the author of it, which is to be preferred when they interfere." Supreme authority grows at the very heart of conscience. "Had it strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world." With much of the same accent Martineau developed his idea of the rational certainty of conscience, comparable to our certainty concerning scientific nature. "The whole ground of ethical procedure consists in this: that we are sensible of a *graduated scale of excellence* among our natural principles, quite distinct from the order of their intensity and irrespective of the range of their eternal effects."

Emotionalists who sometimes avow the general thesis about the emotional basis of conscience do not move in the same direction. They supply us with a *second* theory of origin, with the empirical or historico-social view. Conscience is a product of the individual's social history, a pooling of social demands. Here dwell the modern naturalists who finally, in the name of the sciences, transpose the intuitional position into a skeptical relativism. The necessary steps move along the following road. The beginning is modest enough. Conscience is not an innate faculty. It is an acquisition, out and out. Such a false dichotomy is a favorite at this juncture. Good examples of it are abundant.

The conception of conscience as a kind of transcendental moral law characteristic of human nature as such, by which man intuitively knows what is right and what is wrong, having the authority of a categorical imperative, and armed to punish the transgressor with remorse as a kind of divine judgment within him, is as much a figment as a specific innate religious faculty. The enlarging scope of morals is solely the result of the progress of society in civilization with its more complex relations.⁹

⁹ G. F. Moore, *The Birth and Growth of Religion*, p. 69.

Conscience is a product of experience. Like all other knowledge our moral knowledge develops by an empirical process. Obviously our moral valuations vary with personal disposition, training, experience, age, and type of cultural surroundings. That coincides with a long standing division of labor. Reason in the sciences operates to obtain dependable knowledge. Valuation constitutes the special function of man's emotional nature. Accordingly, although opinion about values derives from experience, it never attains the certainty of valid knowledge. Instead, valuation reflects either the emotional reaction of the individual, his preference as it were, or a built-up sentiment, which is a cluster of feelings associated with some object, such as a family group, a friend, a business institution or a profession.

While this faulty logical framework forms the core of empirical views of conscience, that framework is not the prominent feature. A major portion of interest focuses upon attempts to trace the development of moral ideas. This is a most significant chapter in ethics. An exclusive theory about it has been the approach from the middle of the nineteenth century on. Early empiricism was very definitely modeled on the logic of mathematical rationalism. Although John Locke set out with a repudiation of a rationalistic dogma about innate ideas, his mind was rather completely saturated with the same cardinal ideas. Empiricism and rationalism developed hand in hand. When the leaven of the idea of evolution had worked itself out, a new technique for handling values became apparent. Whereas the older standpoint had neatly divided the labors of reason and feeling, turning over knowledge to reason and valuation to feeling, evolutionism in epistemology shifted the setting. Values are here as subsistents; they operate as a controlling factor in experience. They can be made amenable to scientific knowledge, by a scientific mastery of their conditioning in the world of natural phenomena. Indirectly then values enter the sphere of scientific analysis. The sciences can explore the conditions out of

which values arise, and also by the same token learn how to control their functions. What is not generally recognized, however, is that the evolutionary approach more often is employed in such a manner as to conceal a chapter in fallacious reasoning. I refer to a confusion of a moral value with its concomitant psychological and social conditions.

By this process of reductionism the unique moral meaning apparently evaporates and nothing is left but the material form devoid of the vital meaning. Moral terms are transposed into psychological and social concepts. The moral imperative, for instance, becomes the social imperative—a social demand embedded in a unique emotional complex. Ethics forms a chapter in sociology. In this way conscience is completely naturalized, denatured, and embalmed.

The devices employed in setting forth the conditions out of which moral ideas continually emerge make the adventure most interesting and instructive. Graphic accounts may be found in ethical literature all the way from Plato's *Dialogues* through the more systematic studies which have come to form the utilitarian tradition in ethics, down to the latest treatise that lays claim to be "scientific." If used as a supplemental chapter, the result would be clear gain. When misused as the total available truth about the spirit which informs morality, this naturalistic empirical theory of conscience perpetrates a gigantic fraud upon the human mind. Viewed from the standpoint of its implications for man's spiritual growth the fraud is without parallel in history.

Among the earliest attempts to account for conscience by a theory of its origin may be called the theological or mythical view. This view ranks *third* in our list. Mythical here does not mean fictitious, but, as Plato indicated, is rather a symbolic form for conveying meanings about objects that seem to defy our more prosaic language. In the forefront stands a sense of impenetrable mystery that hovers about the functioning of conscience. In that presence it seems to be very natural for the mind to relate inscrutability with divine

operations. The Greeks sometimes used *tychē*, literally chance, luck, the accidental, what is incapable of being subsumed under a law, as evidence of the gods. Especially strong is the influence of the unusual, the extraordinary, the mysterious. Operations of conscience often strike the mind in those categories. Hence Greek mythology personified the nemesis of a guilty conscience in the form of the Furies. Socrates thought of the compulsory impact of conscience as the operations of a daemon. A daemon meant, not demon, but spirit. Not always are spirits personalized as gods. Yet throughout history there has been a growing consciousness about conscience mediating the voice of God. That notion is often literalistically and crudely expressed. Here the power of misconception sometimes surpasses belief. Not many years ago a church paper of one of the more progressive and potent denominations printed an editorial on conscience. One brief excerpt will illustrate how questions about the nature, functions, and origin of conscience get mixed together. Even the mixture is enlightening. After carefully distinguishing between intuition, judgment, and conscience, the editor continues:

Now if we say that conscience distinguishes right from wrong, impels us to do that which is right, and cheers us when we do it, we may find our personal problems of conduct less troublesome. We shall be able to say that conscience is a divine voice within us; that it is infallible; that it cannot be educated; that it must be obeyed; and that it is always the same among all people.

How is it possible for an idea of conscience to get so far off base? Ordinarily we are struck by the workings of conscience, what people do under the claim of its direction. Immediately questions about the *nature* of conscience begin to take form. And that stirs up speculation on its *origin*. But mature thinking on these matters soon realizes that here are two types of question, that should be distinguished, but not separated: origin and nature. They require to be carefully distinguished

lest the lines of evidence get tangled. The theological view clearly illustrates that. Critics sometimes dismiss it with something less than good-natured contempt. It sounds to them so preposterous. Some versions of the theory are just that. Conscience should never be confused with the voice of God. When effective, that illusion embarrasses the devil; when exposed, it reduces to contempt the ideas of conscience and of God. Even trained minds frequently take a false clew. Explanation becomes intelligible only when dependent relationships are traced toward their remote beginnings. That makes a good beginning, but to look out upon unexplored territory and say God, is evasion, not explanation.

In these opinions are found important truths, and some misdirected effort. In short, the theological view has refused to stay single and becomes an interfusing of many ideas. But a most helpful step has been taken when it is recognized that primary concern here lies with the nature of conscience, not its origin. One might say, this origin form purposely abandons the notion of historical continuity as of secondary importance. What matters most is the work conscience performs in daily living. The origin idea constitutes a device of the human mind for wrestling with the *nature* of something, and underscoring the values discovered by a myth of a worthy derivation. God then signifies the inexhaustible meaning, the ultimate givenness of certain aspects of conscience, and so of its unquestionable right to serve as guide.

With distinctions of this kind clearly in mind, a good many valuable steps have already been taken toward a *fourth* theory of conscience. In order to be transparently clear, consider, first of all and once more, that the main problem concerns not origin in the ordinary sense, but the functioning, nature, and final destiny of conscience. Next, consider that the other three theories are a mixture of truth and falsehood. Take the negative side first. The intuitionist and the theological views share certain common defects. On their premises, conscience should not express such a wild

variety of judgment, changing with locality, and tradition. Why, for example, is war glorified among totalitarians in one age and at the same time condemned by others as the acme of insanity? Human nature and God are made to turn table on the wings of the wind. If conscience derives in total nature from these sources, how could it remain silent on important issues? Why do conscientious and intelligent persons seek to break a siege of an unresponsive conscience by obtaining advice from a friend? Why, again, should conscience contradict its own deliverances on the same issue? Often the whole moral complexion of a situation changes overnight. Examples of this come before the mind in rapid succession. I knew of a brilliant young woman whose conscience told her to become a teaching missionary in a distant part of the world. A fine man came along. His plans called for teaching in a homeland university. Not only did her conscience reverse itself, but those of her parents also. Finally, consider how conscience leads men astray. One needs only to recall Saul of Tarsus in his vigorous campaign against the followers of Jesus. Or the inquisition? Or some methods employed by the defenders of "law and order"?

Turning now to the positive side of the account, it becomes evident that each of the three theories considered are on the trail of important truths, truths which belong in any adequate conception of the nature of conscience. The more significant among them can be summarily stated as follows: first of all, the intuitionist theory is right in maintaining that conscience lies deeply embedded in human nature, more deeply than an accumulation of bits of practical wisdom added together. Moral experience emerges because the human mind brings with it the capacity for moral discernment. Such is the truth in the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence. Knowledge, he said, is a kind of recollection of Ideas. Over against a restricted concept of experience, Kant spoke much of *a priori* principles, principles derived outside *sense* experience and necessary to its understanding. Innate idea is a mislead-

ing name in this connection, because it suggests that concepts arrive fullfledged and never need to gear into or draw upon daily events for their content. *A priori* principles sound fantastic only to the mind which is unaware of the manifold and restricted meanings of the word experience.

The empirical view is undoubtedly correct in holding that conscience develops in the give and take of everyday living. The moral agent lives in an environing world; appropriates from it the raw materials of moral experience, and in turn both transforms and is transformed by the precise nature of that material. Moreover, life does not begin with morally good ideals, finished notions about the right and the good. A moral agent sets out as a child in every sense of the word. He brought with him a child's capacities in morals, just as in other things. He develops his moral ideas according to principles in experience which obtain in other fundamental disciplines. Therefore, moral ideas must be subjected to the same scrutiny as other ideas are, and tested continuously by the same general principles of validity. Such observations have already been abundantly illustrated in previous chapters.

Theological theories of conscience are often closely associated or mixed in with intuitional interpretations. Both of them are absorbed in the problem of the trustworthiness of our moral judgments, and so in the transcendent character of the objects with which those judgments are concerned, namely, with moral value. Two mutually qualifying factors in the situation should be singled out. First, a general appreciation for the decisive significance of the functions of conscience leads the mind to seek for a foundation beyond the foibles of personal preference or the shifting tides of historical scenes. Second, this appreciation further reveals that quality in the human mind whereby it transposes questions about the nature of anything into stories concerning its origin. But the story of origins remains only a convenient outer form. Ultimately the issue is not where conscience came from or how it arrived. These are very important, and

in a proper context contribute to the illumination of the main issue, which centers upon the nature of conscience as disclosed in its functioning. Consequently, theological theories of conscience have back of them a profound sense of the indispensable work of conscience. Most of their defects arise from too much haste in establishing the objective reality of moral values, and especially, of the dependability of moral insight. Deduction of moral value from theological systems, or assuming the trustworthiness of a sincere intuition are a delusion and a snare, prepared by the devil for indolent people.

Empirical versions on conscience specialize on the historical and developmental aspects. The social sciences and psychology are the chief allies in following through on this fascinating story. Conscience neither drops from heaven as a finished product, nor like the legendary Athena springs full-grown from the deeps of human nature. There is an unmistakable developmental side to conscience, in which it assimilates content from its cultural and physical surroundings. A particular conscience can be dated in the language of its local conditioning. Hence two of the more important chapters in anybody's ethics deal with the history and the psychology of conscience. Yet while chapters help to make a book, it is never wise to identify the book with any two of its chapters.

In summary, then, conscience makes up an integral part of a whole personality. On one side, therefore, the marks of individuality are upon it. It shares in the changing vicissitudes of daily experience. Conscience develops within the context of selfhood. As part of the self, it represents an achievement. Custom and law can propose, but the conscience of the individual disposes its meaning. It participates in the limitations and the growing integrity of the self as a whole. What we call social conscience singles out special relationships for emphasis. Usually it concerns itself with questions in spheres of community interest, and vocalizes co-operative ways and means for promoting a common welfare. Moral

insight is accelerated by a facing of community situations together. Some tasks will get done, only when men are stirred by a common sentiment, about a particular set of values in a definite situation. While therefore a social conscience performs many useful functions, chief among them the acting as a constant reminder of the social nature of personality, it should not be taken literally. Such a social conscience is mythical, *i.e.*, a useful symbol to indicate one aspect of conscience in its wholeness.

On the other hand, conscience manifests what might be called a timeless form. By this I mean simply that moral experience participates as an organic phase of human experience. Just as we acknowledge the transcendent element in the sciences, in the arts, in religion, and in philosophy, so here in the moral life. Consider a few of its more obvious signs. Conscience signifies a moral discernment on the right and the good in human conduct and character. It speaks in the tone of an unconditional imperative, and has as its point of reference a norm or standard of the highest life. From that norm, authority is derived for requiring a continuous improvement in the moral agent and the surroundings. In its transcendental aspect conscience stands within the flow of experience, reinterpreting the past, judging the present, and forth-telling the better future. In that capacity it safeguards the health and integrity of the total self. Conscience seeks to attain impartial valuation and aims at the discovery of universal principles. It is severely critical with the very self where leniency might be expected, but generous in its estimate of other persons. Finally, its authority is the compulsion of the truth about the highest character values, and obedience to it is optional. The reason is that conscience finds its tap root in human freedom.

VI. THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS

Our discussion of theories of origin has shown how, under examination, the original question changes to read, what is

the nature and function of conscience? A study of its manifold functioning indicates that conscience includes something of the whole personality, in the full sweep of its development and at its farthest reach into its cosmic relationships. Its work is clear-cut and specific. Conscience comprises a discernment in moral values that forms the basal integrity of a human personality. It is the whole self in actions that decide whether a life will be better or worse in relation to an ideal of the best.

Clearly, then, the educating of conscience in terms of the best life becomes a matter of primary consideration. At present only a few suggestions can be made. In the light of our discussions, two of them appear to be especially relevant. In the first place, a normal conscience passes through *five* stages in the process of self-education. *First* in time comes the stage of conformity to custom. Individuality emerges only slowly, and group domination holds on tenaciously. In an ascending scale of refinement for group authority, custom is followed in succession by levels of potent influence. After the grip of custom has been slackened it is supported by written codes, then in mixed order by civil enactments, maxims, economic conditions, political organization and by social institutions like the school and the church. Never is the demand issued in the name of society silenced. Its influence constantly shifts in degree of control, but is never eliminated from a healthy life. Much truth gets itself embedded in tradition, along with vestigial remains that cling for dear life. The process by which social authority gets itself constituted insures some degree of selectivity, and an urge toward revision. The customary stage or level, then, contains much wisdom from the funded results of past experience. In it an elementary rationality works to leaven the whole, on behalf of a better moral level of achievement.

At a *second* level, a more open alliance takes place between morality and religion. What a people comes to regard as its best moral insights are further clarified by publication as

part of a hallowed literature. Such a summary we have in the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic laws, the famous Code of Hammurabi, the collections of proverbs and books of wisdom found among every race, the Sermon on the Mount. Two things stand out. Above all is a very evident concern that moral wisdom gained at so great sacrifice shall be preserved as a legacy to future generations. Then, as if to seal its human significance, that insight is bolstered by appeal to divine sanction. A man *ought* to do, because God has a right to command it. He commands it because in it the best life for all mankind is nurtured. What God approves, a man may safely do. Divine approval constitutes a certificate of genuine validity. But a fatal flaw appears when divine approval is assimilated to very human traditions contained in the Scriptural records and elsewhere. What depth of arrogant haste remains after the Scriptures are literally identified with the word of God in these matters? If, however, Scriptures are taken as a record of a developing experience, it sheds a perpetual and increasing light on the universal moral situation.

A *third* level is constituted in part through revolt by the moral agent against a too rigid authority of customary standards. Conscience is only recognized as such after self-assertion has broken the authoritarian grip of the group upon its members. Conscience that has been submerged as a mirror of social demands now awakens a sense of personal responsibility and projects claims for self-respect. Conflicts grow both in range and intensity. On one side, the gradual transposition of authority from group dominance into free acknowledgment of truth about the highest character values is a complicated and checkered process. Nor is the individual always especially eager to win his freedom. More often he rebels at the suggestion of forsaking his wonted security. Moral responsibility is not an easy weight. Besides, there is a smug satisfaction found in a routine response that is continually being plastered by social approval.

Both because the human creature would rather feel safe

than discover a higher truth and because he dreads nothing quite so much as social disapproval, our moral heredity helps to constitute a "second nature" that drags on as a dead weight to defeat the runner. The extreme reactions of sophistication speak in the gospel of self-expressionism. Here we meet the liberty of the libertine. Since for such a person past experience is mostly rubbish and our fathers were innocent fools, the "right thing" is to dismiss the censor stationed at the top of the basement stairs and allow each of the impulses, little and big, to possess its kingdom in the freedom of nonrestraint. In honorable Protagorean phrase, "Man is the measure of all things." By interpretation this means that whatever the individual thinks right is right. Morals are a matter of opinion. The only limitation comes from lack of power to satisfy desire. That is one reason why weaker members conspire to develop a moral code more suitable to their incapacity. If this society for the meek of the earth could only capitalize on all of human inertia, gullibility, and mediocrity of attainment, life would be turned upside down. Morals would then become king in the land of kill-joy. Meanwhile let us eat, drink and follow through on all possible sensual diversion, for tomorrow may catch us napping. Such, in brief, is the so-called philosophy of the sophisticate who thinks that wisdom reduces to sophistry, that love means lust, and that living signifies continuing to vegetate. His original progenitor comes to life in Plato's *Gorgias*.¹⁰

As a *fourth* level the education of conscience is required to face the maxim of a golden rule morality. Treat other persons as you would like to be treated. That rule seems axiomatic, self-evident, and final. It belongs to the garnered wisdom of history, so that its source goes unspecified. Like the axiom about a straight line marking the shortest distance between two points, it forms part of our truth. Every people has its wisdom literature, and much of it heads up in this maxim. Doubtless, the big reason is that its truth be-

¹⁰ See especially 483 B-E.

longs to the elemental wisdom of the race. Plato and Aristotle formulate it. Among modern ethicists, the utilitarians, beginning with Bentham, have made explicit use of it. Everyone is to count for one, and only once. In this way the goods of life would be more equitably divided, and the happiness goal be more nearly realized. John Stuart Mill, for his own reasons, identified "the Golden Rule of Jesus of Nazareth" with his own theory. Sidgwick in succession laid it down as one of the two basal ethical principles.¹¹ Now ethicists and everyday moralists vie with each other in praising the golden rule as the acme of moral truth. For one thing, the psychology underlying this contention throws light upon its general acceptance. Our European tradition favors a self-interest psychology. The springs of action, it is held, arise in self-concern, and return to the enlargement of the self as to their home. Self-love is also the root of most of the ills which flourish under man's inhumanity to his own kind. Wherefore, if only a way might be found—yes, moral education must find a principle to overcome or at least to mitigate this brutal disregard for others. Indeed the proof of this psychology appears to be confirmed by even the most casual observation of the way we live.

Suppose we look at the principle a little more closely. Its psychology, to begin with, is archaic and false, because it is built upon the model of Newtonian logic. Mathematical logic had chopped experience into indivisible atoms. These atoms behave in relation to each other according to the laws of attraction and repulsion. So much for its physics. Biologically life learns its first lessons in the struggle for survival. Self-interest is engendered as the law of life. Self-preservation, you know. . . . Morally, pleasure and pain are the final objects of devotion or aversion. While we can not change human nature, we may redirect it in such a way as to modify its original selfishness bent. Hence the golden rule.

In the second place, instead of assuming an original self-centeredness in human nature, we might try to find room

¹¹ His third principle is actually a reformulation of the second.

for environmental conditioning in our wherefores of human conduct. Selfishness abounds, entirely too much of it. Is it either safe to blame that onto human nature, or on a respectful attitude toward moral facts? Isn't there a tinge of dishonesty about excusing ourselves altogether for the reactions of our neighbors toward us? Again, what about the implied goal of social good? If everybody takes in his neighbor's washing, what becomes of the concept of social good? Actually values are realized only in personalities, not in a convenient abstraction called social welfare. Lovers of beauty appreciate golden sunsets behind majestic mountain peaks that are canopied by silver clouds, but no social group does. On close examination this moral goal called social good is an illusion with a compound fracture where its head should be.

Finally, the golden rule in practice must frequently mean rule by specialized interests. Reduced to its essential terms this rule is scuttled from the start by a false assumption. Suppose that what appears good to me, I try to make a universal principle of action. Can it be safely assumed that I know what the highest good means? I think not. That is an ideal of wisdom, unrealized by most, if not all of us. If I regard my vision of good as a tentative light that must be improved at any cost, the picture changes radically. I must act on my best insight, but I do not presume that my candle is the sun. The highest moral end does not resolve into a wide distribution of mediocre values. Only Jesus can be trusted with the application of the golden rule, because his moral insight is dependable. And since he has the requisite moral understanding, the golden rule becomes irrelevant. Its one saving grain of wisdom runs like this: Try to be impartial in all your relationships. That is good counsel, but not the goal of moral perfection.

At a *fifth* level conscience turns in humble searching for light from good men in all ages. Far from being the simple suggestion it appears to be, the suggestion throws an unrelieved responsibility upon every person. To begin with it is not easy to distinguish moral greatness. At various

periods historians have manufactured their own ideals of distinction. However, in the histories of ethics, of which there are too few, a rather rigid and dependable set of principles appear as aids to selection. But what is the ordinary person to do? He gives his main strength to the struggle for a livelihood. He must depend for guidance upon the leaders whom his labors help to release. And what of the guides? If they are indolent, and sodden over with a prejudice for simple solutions, then conscience must limp along. Muddling through is hardly the name for that. Criminal negligence charges cannot be preferred. As sincere souls grope along in the twilight of common-sense opinions, consuming vital energies in useless experimentation, and growing old with an increasing sense of ultimate frustration, the Satanic imps chalk up another victory. What of the blind guides? Heaven is barred to them, and hell cannot tolerate their kind.

Suppose, then, that a conscience turned to Socrates, to Plato, to Kant, to a Buddha, a Lao-tse, or a Jesus. We Christians have Jesus. Do we? We have embalmed some figure in our creeds, construed a psychologically normal individual, traced the sociological factors of a first-century culture in Palestine. But what of the moral personality of Jesus of Nazareth? That we do not know very well. We have inherited too many prejudices. It is easier to follow the grooves of our tradition. The institutions in our world are too deeply indebted to moral obtuseness, and they threaten anyone who even speculates about more light. In spite of all these things there is a lure about his life that will not be denied. Neither the world, the weakness of flesh, nor the edicts of the barons, can deflect his light. He is that light "which lighteth every man, coming into the world." You and I will have to go on living with the conscience we have, but our highest obligation will always be to regenerate it by the measure of the man who so lived that his friends said: "He is not like us; he must be the Son of God." In that direction lies a Christian conscience.

Freedom Within the Moral Law

A RECENT Gifford lecturer, Sir W. David Ross, in closing the series on *Foundations of Ethics*, singled out the problem of freedom for an illuminating comment. "It seems to me that something like half of our ordinary thinking on moral questions implies a belief in the indeterminism of the will, and something like half a belief in its determination; and I have neither found elsewhere nor discovered by my own reflections any adequate solution of this difficulty."¹ These words might be regarded as a warning. This road has all the signs of hardgoing, and not a few wrecks are strewn along the way. A legend has it that a famous author of a Greek grammar left the prepositions to the last, hoping that he would die before he got to them. Many moralists who face the problem of moral freedom are able to understand that attitude.

I. PRESUPPOSITION AND PROBLEM

The problem simply must be faced somehow. Freedom is a big word in ethics. Begin on any living topic in moral experience and soon or late the problem of freedom will confront you. Kant was indubitably right in locating the vital nerve center of the moral life in this area. Freedom, he held, is a necessary presupposition of morality. A presupposition gets down to rock bottom in essentials. It is something you accept as true, or else. The superstructure stands or falls with it. But it is one thing to acknowledge the general fact of freedom in the moral life, and something very different to back up that acknowledgment with evidence on its nature which can withstand assault. I do not mean to suggest that freedom is altogether on the defensive. On the contrary, freedom is much in evidence and the burden of proof lies on the op-

¹ P. 328,

posite side. What requires clearing is the ambiguous nature of the problem, so that it can be set intelligibly. No sensible answer can be given to a shifty question. And when a problem has been fairly stated, the most difficult steps toward its solution have been negotiated.

At the outset, then, let it be kept in mind that freedom does not require defense so much as clarification. Our task is not to "prove" it so much as to inquire into its meaning. First, then, recall that freedom is presupposed in many activities that we assume are important. The idea of responsibility works constantly in our main human relationships. How far does family life go without the acceptance of responsibility? Friendship moves along on the plane of mutual trust because each one freely accepts and gladly carries responsibility. Business transactions rest squarely on that base. Our civil laws can deal directly only with the deed side of the moral process. Yet they are forced to extend their domain through the application of the concept of responsible action. Laws aim at making secure the minimum conditions of rational life together. In the nature of the case law operates with the handicap of externality—the more elemental conditions of spiritual homogeneity can be reached only mediately. Nevertheless, legal science works to the end of fixing responsibility for the overt act, and appeals by various expedients to the individual to act responsibly. So that civil law becomes in practice less a display of autocratic authority, and more a means of educating responsible personalities in the art of free citizenship. All educational procedures assume a freedom in response, and the inculcation of dependable loyalties toward responsible conduct.

Finally, rational personalities do hold themselves morally accountable, without regard for their own discomfort. Both remorse and a quiet self-respect depend upon a man's accountability in terms of moral ideals. Freedom is the complement of responsibility; they are aspects of one living unity. Moral action means consciously directed action. Consciously

directed action means willed action. Willing involves choice between alternatives. Choice implicates responsibility and presupposes freedom. Otherwise "ought" loses its meaning as a moral term. And the fact of the universal efficacy of moral ideals, backed by indisputable evidence of moral advance, puts beyond reasonable doubt the fact of freedom of some kind. That is not enough, but it makes a good beginning.

II. INHERITED PREJUDICES

Discussions on the nature of moral freedom soon remove all doubt from a reader's mind concerning the operation of hordes of prejudices. Our next step will attempt to remove some of these barriers to a fair perspective. Something worth while will have been gained, provided we can track down the more influential biases and examine the lair in which they live when off duty. Consider, in the first place, a bias that arises unintentionally, as a by-product of scientific development. Two main ideas operate for mutual support. One stresses the fact of continuity, and the other specializes on a method of scientific classification. For a representative statement on the general position a passage by William James combines these two ideas and gives the gist of the matter. The psychologist, for example, brings with him an ideal of explanation.

He wants to build a *Science*; and a Science is a system of fixed relations. Wherever there are independent variables, there Science stops. . . . In other words, she must deal with the *general laws* of volition exclusively; with the impulsive and inhibitory character of ideas; with the nature of their appeals to the attention; with the conditions under which effort may arise, etc.; but not with the precise amounts of effort, for these, if our wills be free, are impossible to compute. She thus abstracts from free will, without necessarily denying its existence. Practically, however, such abstraction is not distinguished from rejection; and most actual psychologists have no hesitation in denying that free will exists.²

² *Psychology*, p. 457 (Briefer course).

Aside from peculiarities of expression the passage still stands as a capital illustration.

There is something ironic in the situation. No greater single achievement can be accredited to human ingenuity within modern times than the development of the sciences. And now to think that the instrument designed to remove prejudice and encourage more impartiality of spirit toward the basic facts of experience should be so misused. It all comes from lack of care in the application of these new tools. But some foibles of the gravest consequences live on where scientific methodology is misconstrued. That misuse impinges on our problem at two points.

First of all, in the descriptive sciences, the ideal of explanation moves forward on the principle of sequence of events. Explanation takes place in terms of tracing relationships back to the *terminus a quo*, the dim recesses of the past whence the elements of an event had their origin. Theoretically, when the story of continuity is thus concluded, explanation stands completed. In the chain of antecedents alternating with consequents scientific explanation realizes its power. Here are the roots of the so-called law of causality, in a combination of two of its various meanings. One attributes efficiency or agency to an antecedent link in the chain; the other holds simply that one set of changes are correlated with another set of changes. The social and psychological sciences that are more intimately related to ethics in the study of moral experience carry along this ideal of scientific explanation. With a scientific analysis of the social and psychological factors in the moral situation arises the vague notion that freedom must disappear as scientific explanation moves on.

Operating in this situation are four related fallacies. *First*, freedom is equated with a jack-in-the-box action, unrelated to other events. This notion goes beyond the idea of freedom as the removal of external constraint, as when a person is physically moved about or acts under dire economic stress of need for himself and his family. It further asserts that free-

dom means complete indeterminism—a total breach of continuity in relationship. Such is the freedom that is denied in the name of scientific explanation. Of course no competent ethicist is interested in that kind of freedom. That would be the freedom of a totally disorganized mind, pathological freedom.

Second, continuity of relationship is supposed to be of only one kind, and disjunction the only alternative. Actually continuity may be any one of many kinds. For instance, continuity of space-time relation differs radically from the logical implication of ideas. In both cases continuity is an important factor. Here the main assumption is that continuity signifies complete dependence of successive stages in a process. Ignoring in these ways the provisional character of a scientific explanation, the raw materials of ethics, and the nature of freedom in particular, are set within a distorted framework of faulty hypotheses.

Third, under a banner of what constitutes a scientific explanation, the function of ethical interpretation is usurped by sociology and psychology. On this view, just because ethics comprises a critical examination of one class of values it cannot justify its claim to be a science. Ethics cannot establish its claims for two reasons. One, it does not meet a supposedly exclusive ideal of scientific explanation; the other ground lies in the nature of values. Values require a different set of tools called concepts, and they envisage another ideal of explanation. The lack of scientific character in ethics therefore depends entirely upon a wooden notion of what constitutes a science.

Finally, the stage of prejudice has been set for a misconstruction of moral facts. Concepts first constructed for use in the sciences were based largely on mathematical logic. Here thinking reaches the limit of abstraction. These tools have fully justified their use on the world of physical nature. But it is increasingly apparent that this atomic logic is less appropriate in the biotic sciences, still less for a study of the

mind. On the ascending scale of "being" transformation of basal concepts becomes more thoroughgoing. When the social sciences, for example, undertake to displace ethics their conceptual tools make misconstruction of moral values inevitable. All along the development of the natural sciences the ideal of logic has sought to exclude values and to deal with "existence." Frequently murky-headed scientists are no longer content to accept the provisional status and supplementary function of their own sciences. They insist, on the contrary, upon reducing moral facts to social, psychological, and economic terms.

If these ideas have relevance to our subject, it is plain that "scientific" approaches to the problem of freedom are deservedly under suspicion. This is doubly the case when scientific principles are misused as metaphysics. Here the problem of freedom is most acute. Moral facts simply will not accede to the unfounded demand that they be constricted to fit into preconceived concepts. The concepts, for one thing, were designed to work on materials of another order. Then, too, just because morality is organic to the whole of experience, no good reason can be given why it should be swallowed by other specialized scientific disciplines or by a naturalistic philosophy. In naturalism scientific bias reaches its deeper ramifications. The very peak of achievement in the immorality of the so-called descriptive sciences lies just here—in a spurious brand of philosophy known as naturalism. Except for first-rate scientists, the principles and conclusions of the sciences are forever spilling over into explicit metaphysical theory. On one hand, there operates the *nisus* of the human mind toward comprehensive explanation. The philosophical temper of man makes him impatient at arbitrary boundaries. On the other hand, the splendid achievements of the sciences encourage in some an overzealous spirit. That is where an indiscriminate extension of the sciences as a philosophical theory of reality puts in appearance.

Because of the kinship in materials involved, the humanis-

tic sciences supply the notable examples for our purpose. But naturalism develops its specific varieties, and as metaphysics weaves together a host of indiscriminate factors. Eighteenth-century naturalism, for example, concentrated upon the materials of the physical sciences. Then came Comte, the great seminal philosopher with his monumental *Cours de philosophie positiv* (1830-42). His famous law of the three stages generated a profound influence for naturalism. According to this law, explanation had passed through the theological, and the metaphysical, on its way to reach the scientific stage.

Three ideas make history in this connection. First comes the bold repudiation of metaphysics; second, the unqualified exultation of the sciences; and finally, the discovery of the humanistic sciences of history, psychology and sociology. Discovery here is a tentative word. Since the dawn of reflection men have been developing these materials. Comte, however, placed special emphasis on the social character of our ideas, and gave fresh impetus to the organization of the social sciences. The final ingredient for modern naturalism was supplied by rapid developments in the general idea of organic evolution. The total impact of these cumulative processes is enormous, enough to overwhelm the mind. One can gain an idea of the tremendous force of a tradition in producing a general impression from a passage written by a late nineteenth-century moral philosopher. It indicates also the predicament in which the modern mind finds itself. Its burden is that what is believed to be moral freedom constitutes the last stand made against the advance of scientific concepts.

This belief that events are determinately related to the state of things immediately preceding them, is now held by all competent thinkers in respect of all kinds of occurrences except human volitions. It has steadily grown both intensively and extensively, both in clearness and certainty of conviction and in universality of application, as the human mind has developed and human experience has been systematized and enlarged. Step by step in successive departments of fact conflicting modes

of thought have receded and faded, until at length they have vanished everywhere, except from this mysterious citadel of Will. Everywhere else the belief is so firmly established that some declare its opposite to be inconceivable: others even maintain that it always was so. Every scientific procedure assumes it: each success of science confirms it.³

The stage of naturalistic metaphysics being set, the problem of moral freedom assumes a new formulation. A new center for the picture was found in the combined ideas of the uniformity of nature and the universality of natural laws. Uniformity was rooted in the ideal of scientific explanation through abstract classification and the law of causal sequence. The universality section expresses a practical hypothesis for advancing research in the sciences. Later this scientific hypothesis gets mixed up with a philosophical conclusion.

At this point we can obtain no better idea of the relevance of a refined naturalistic standpoint than to observe the procedures of the author referred to at the opening of the chapter.⁴ This writer is extremely careful. He dismisses the *a priori* argument for determinism as an aside. He takes a stand on the first major conclusion that neither determinism nor indeterminism can be established on the basis of empirical evidence. Then, after accepting the law of causality, absolutely for physical nature, he tries to reconcile moral responsibility with "mental causation" which operates in the moral life. The reconciling comes out equivocably, which is to say badly. For the implied notions of freedom are confusing, and we are warned against "claiming a moral agent can act independently of his character."⁵ The case for the freedomist is made to rest with the nature of choice and the consciousness of duty. Choice, on the one hand, always emerges out of a welter of desires. Duty, on the other hand, tends to be represented as something over against all desire. As between them pre-eminence goes to choice, for consciousness of duty is an

³ Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, p. 62.

⁴ Sir W. David Ross, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, chap. X.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

elusive factor. Besides, a conscientious action comes under the same description as those where the thought of duty is absent. Action takes place "in accordance with the strongest desire present at the moment."⁶ The problem merges, then, into the nature of choice. Its (psychological) genuineness is beyond question. Here he seems to alternate between choice as the strength of a dominant impulse and choice as "the trend of the whole character, of the whole system of more or less permanent desires, including of course the desire to do one's duty."⁷

Henceforth it looks like a race between dominant character and present impulse; and, again, like a confusion of intentional idea with respect to a proposed action and the psychological concomitants of that idea. In the end freedom and moral responsibility are in part an illusory game which we play, but there obtains a notable justification for the game. Its illusory character arises partly from our limited knowledge (that is, knowledge of a certain kind).⁸ We are justified by "the capacity for setting ourselves to affect changes," a marked ability which we possess to originate actions, entirely within the self.⁹ Only let it be kept in mind that the capacity is to set oneself to do, not to perform the act. Hence the widespread tendency in which the metaphysical argument favors determinism and all the ethical arguments lean toward freedom.¹⁰

The very excellences of this discussion are so marked that we are justified in presenting a concluding paragraph in the author's own words.

If my line of argument is right, we must find the uniqueness of moral behaviour not in freedom from the general law of causation, but in the unique character of the activities which constitute such behaviour—the activity of choosing or deciding, and the activity of setting one-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

self to do what one has decided to do, to which there is no analogy in the behaviour of any physical thing; and in the further fact, to which there is nothing analogous in the behaviour of a mere animal, that one of the thoughts under whose influence one can choose and set oneself to act is the thought of an action as right.¹¹

A study of the chapter as a whole shows an inclination toward the idea of self-conditioning moral activity. This reflects a basic notion in the idea of freedom, and one to which we must turn presently. For the moment, it should not escape our attention how heavily the idea of scientific causality hangs over our philosophical heads. No doubt can be entertained as to its relevancy as a scientific principle for dealing with nature. Its philosophical implications are vast. However, such extensions of an hypothesis should be carefully safeguarded. The exact meaning must be determined. And then, in addition, we should carry a clear distinction between the various meanings of the law of causality and the inferences drawn from the systems of thought which employ these laws. Obviously, what we so often meet is the false inference that the continuities and uniformities of experience indicate that moral freedom is a mirage and determinism thereby established. To make such an inference means the airing of a whole nest of prejudices.

III. NATURE OF MORAL FREEDOM

If this argument heads in the right direction, it makes clear that no intelligent discussion can center upon freedom of the will. The truth upon which the main contentions of the determinist position feeds has forever laid that ghost. The world in which we live is shot through with orderliness and unity. The moral will does not stand out in isolation from the total self. A teacher once illustrated freedom of the will by a balance scale. On each side of the fulcrum were weighty considerations. The will, he said, expressed its freedom by tipping the balance in one direction or the other. Such a

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

notion of a will, detached from the self like a dynamo held in reserve for special occasions, is not only nonsense, it is culpable nonsense. Back of it hovers the ghost of an abandoned faculty psychology. From every possible angle the light on the self which we can muster points to the essential interfusion of willing, feeling, and thinking. These terms designate so many ways in which the self functions. In any instance one of them usually dominates in our observation, but the living process called the self operates throughout and insures a changing succession of authority. All willing involves an apprehended object, some kind of feeling, and a response to the object appreciated. Something of the total self is expressed in each part of what takes place. Freedom, then, is a problem in which the whole self is involved. More exactly, our problem concerns *the freedom of the moral self* taken as an organic whole.

If now the will is in reality the total self in experience with all its predispositions, habits, feelings, desires, aims, and ideals, expressing itself in manifold ways and continuously active, the perspective of our problem is radically modified. In its changed form, not less caution is required to deal with it but more. For one thing the apparent merging of the will within the self should not suggest an extension of the process whereby the self is dissipated into thin air of conceptual relationships. That disposition is much alive today. According to some "the human soul is its environment, seen from within." Or, more crudely, the self reduces to an impulse vortex in the transition of external processes. Often attempts to write a purely scientific description completely flatten the self out and roll it into the environmental dough. When first I was introduced to psychology texts, I turned with eagerness to the chapter on the self. The accounts were puzzling for a time, until it dawned on me that the picture was provisional, abstract, and tailored to meet the requirements of a scientific ideal. These accounts remain a most fascinating study to this day. They are invariably stimulating.

But I read now with a measure of appreciation for what the psychological self is intended to be, and I never reduce the whole self to one of its aspects. It is the special business of scientific studies to co-ordinate aspects of the natural world order. Therefore when these accounts get out of focus the self is unintentionally but fatefully distorted.

Both common-sense theory and the scientific mind find it uncommonly difficult to distinguish relationship from dependence, dependence from determination, determination from causality, causality from necessary sequence, necessary sequence from continuity, discontinuity from freedom and freedom from arbitrary lawlessness. Common-sense theory fails from lack of scrutiny. The nominally scientific mind does so because, setting out from the common-sense standpoint, it continues the road of simplification by abstraction. Mathematical physics naturally became the first extensive arena of experiment. The new world created by scientific development amply justified the tools employed. Emboldened by an initial success with a study of nature, the scientific method, modeled on nature, looked for new worlds to conquer. The carry-over of that historically conditioned methodology is too vast to be appreciated. That is why an unbiased recognition of the new levels of the spirit tarries so long. Our scientific concepts and our language are fashioned after the world of tangible things. Knowledge theory is almost completely immersed in sense perceptions, manipulated by mathematical rules and bent upon manipulation and control. Explanation employs the consecrated concepts of a restricted empiricism and an abstract rationalism. Except in rare instances general epistemological theory has not caught up with Kantian criticism.

Applied to the freedom of the moral self our orthodox scientific symbolism begs the question at the very start. Use of these concepts resembles the labors of the man who carried water in a sieve, and complained about the unreality of water because it did not prove itself by the sieve. The terms rela-

tionship, dependence, causality, sequence, continuity, freedom, orderliness are all relevant to the activities of the moral self. If only we could take a suggestion from Kant that the same mind which explores nature with one set of appropriate categories, must allow for the construction of other categories adapted to the materials of mind, morals, aesthetics and religion. In other words, cognition of nature yields one kind of valid explanation; valuational judgment provides another kind that is relevant to the life of the human spirit. If the same language symbols are to be employed, at least new and appropriate meanings can provide the content. To such an approach belongs the following account of important aspects of the moral self.

The self, too, is the organic unity of all its activities, vastly richer and more varied than those of animal life. And just as the mechanical formulae of inorganic nature are inadequate to plant life, and the formulae of plant life to the more complex life of the animal kingdom, so other and still more complex formulae, we hold, must be conceived as expressing activities of the conscious, reasoning self, rising as it does above all these lower grades of being. If there is a "must" in the sequence of events within the self, it is not the "must" which expresses the uniformity of sequence with which one material body moves at the impact of another.¹²

IV. A MATTER OF DEGREE

Viewing the moral self in its contextual setting it is evident that freedom manifests at least *three* fundamental characteristics. Consider them in order, and first, that *moral freedom is a matter of degree*. On one side, the issue is not whether the moral self is free, but in what degree. Freedom in the sense of ability to modify conduct and character in the direction of an ideal "is presupposed by *any* theory of ethics."¹³ But that question of degree must be carried along with us awaiting additional light from the other two features. That degree is contingent upon the other related considerations

¹² W. G. Everett, *Moral Values*, pp. 350-351.

¹³ W. M. Urban, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, p. 314.

also. On the other side, the fact of the conditionedness of the self is too plain to ignore. In this direction the question of degree turns essentially upon the meaning or laws of conditionedness. Straightway the idea of uniformity and necessity of nature returns to plague our thought. This is the case, because the moral self inhabits a body, and that body has its roots deep in the soils of the natural world order. Then, too, the moral self lives in the most intimate union with the whole self, which includes the scientific, artistic, religious, social and institutional framework. Besides, all these concomitants of moral selfhood have a history, and this suggests a shifting status within each one, and in relation to each other.

While living *in* and *through* these manifold relationships, what degree of freedom belongs to the moral self? What does freedom in this context mean? Ask the question either way. We have already faced evidence which casts doubt upon the popular conception of nature as exhibiting a rigid mechanical conformity to general laws. That is an unwarranted inference from the notion of scientific law, where a law compresses a statement of man's available understanding of the relations which obtain between parts of the natural order. Scientific laws do not, as we say, control anything. In no sense are these laws an agency. They are in fact pragmatic generalizations based upon observations with a limited technique. Beyond doubt natural laws presuppose orderliness in nature, but essentially in the meaning of dependable relationship. Generalizations of various kinds for limited purposes can be deduced from that type of relationship. Mechanical causality is one such deduction, and the evidence mounts which indicates that its usefulness diminishes with the growth of scientific and philosophical understanding. Statistical averages express another useful deduction. Actuarial figures are constantly opening up new possibilities. And so on down a long list. The main conclusion which appears is that the uniformity of nature is neither an axiomatic truth, nor an

empirically verifiable fact. Natural law is a useful *postulate*, arising from our need for improving human control. Our scientific era had as a motto: "Knowledge is power." Mechanical necessity in nature turns out to be a gratuitous and exaggerated metaphor.

If the mechanical determinism of nature is up for drastic revision in the name of scientific construction, how much more caution should be employed concerning those relationships which obtain at the level of the spirit where the normal self emerges into characteristic individuality. At that level its continuity with nature stands within a reconditioned perspective. External limitations such as space-time, threats to human welfare from natural phenomena, are being diminished at an astonishing rate. A growing knowledge has transferred power out of the secret processes of nature and placed it in the hands of men.

The more serious perils and limitations arise from within human relationships. Envy, indolence, greed, gullibility, perfidy, ignorance, sensuality, smug self-satisfaction, disorganization, the fixations of emotional infantilism, lust for recognition and for power—these intangibles of the spirit help to create the barriers to spiritual health and progress. In brief, the very capacities within the self and out of which a higher freedom may be forged are for the time subject to being misdirected, so that new links in the chain of human slavery are welded together. New forms of slavery are constantly being created: respectable forms of slavery like alcoholism, narcotics administered in small habit-forming quantities, broadcast blurbs and printed patterings of a sewer mentality, more pious platitudes draped in quipster aphorisms. Yet all of this excess baggage is to a large extent self-conditioned. It lies within the reach of co-operative living to redirect creatively the energies consumed by their tyranny over us.

One sufficient reason for believing in the possibility of concrete moral freedom daily confronts us. It is a vast resource of the self, which has assumed two very definite forms

of achievement. In more psychological language, a person comes into more pronounced integration by way of a contrast between the self and the not-self. Consciousness arises in an awareness of distinction between objects and of their status in contrast with the self. Selfhood is maintained and becomes distinctive, i.e., attains individuality by further differentiating itself by a creative treatment of its not-self. Attempts to attain individuality in cheap ways invite pity, scorn, or only incite to amusement. Yet even these manifestations have their point.

The self lives through heightened contrast within its environing world. The scientist, poet, philosopher, artist, religious leader, give expression both to an intensification of self-conscious living, and to a second and more profound token of freedom. Human personality lives in and through enhanced self-transcendence. The self differentiates, selects, proposes, and executes purposes. Fundamentally selfhood is a teleological idea; it is a purpose given concrete actuality. In order to do this the self must transcend its material. Just as the artist is not enmeshed by his material, and to a degree is limited by it, so with the self. But great art beautifies the world, not alone or primarily by the limitations encountered in the process of its creation. A free and self-conditioned personality undertakes to objectify an ideal of beauty. The whole self is conceived in freedom, executed in self-conditioning freedom, and dedicated to the extension and elevation of the spirit of freedom forever.

V. AN ACHIEVEMENT

Already our thinking has taken us into the second qualification: *Freedom represents personal achievement*. Of course, in at least two senses freedom comes as a gift. But this gift remains so essentially qualified in its reception that we can afford to let the achievement proposition stand. Moral freedom, the only kind we are discussing in this chapter, is not created *ex nihilo* or by fiat methods. Heredity, biological

and social, has much to offer for and against the achievement of concrete freedom by any person. Our earlier chapters have made that clear, or render an attempt at present useless. They have also tried to clarify the concept of experience,¹⁴ pointing out how our descriptive sciences are concerned with only certain aspects that are abstracted for the purpose of study. They have taken nature as their province. There the habit of abstraction has proven so successful as a methodology, that its prestige has carried it beyond the sciences into philosophical tradition.

One result is unfortunate for everybody. Philosophies constructed solely upon materials drawn from the sciences must be pseudo philosophy. Philosophy claims to give a comprehensive interpretation of the whole of experience, in so far as that is possible. The sciences claim only to be concerned with some abstracted segment. No philosophy deserves a moment's consideration that ignores the invaluable materials supplied by the sciences. These are indispensable for philosophical thinking. Yet it is impossible, I take it, to add together abstracted fragments of experience and obtain a concrete whole. If I segmentize an organic whole for limited purposes, my forgetting the abstraction will not negate the factuality of what I have done. But even if it were possible that experience were an additive whole, naturalistic philosophies still fall short of the demand laid upon every philosophy to interpret experience comprehensively. Reality is richer in content than naturalistic philosophies have dreamed.

Experience is constituted by many orders of fact, some of which are not dealt with in the descriptive sciences. That is nothing against the sciences. Thinking reserves the right to delimit its area of interest, so long as it makes that limit known and adheres to its premises. One of the unexamined areas that stands out is the logical conditions of knowledge.

¹⁴ Experience is a chameleon word. It means about all things to all men. Watch its context. Here I employ experience in the comprehensive sense of reality; man, the world, God and whatever else can claim significance, as part of the living whole.

For centuries descriptive sciences have assumed a solution of epistemological questions and have gone on to other problems. This has shown itself to be both proper and dangerous. Proper, because had the scientists waited until philosophers had solved the problem of knowledge, work might never have begun. As it is, scientists have done very well. But not well enough, by their own confessions. Aside from occasional qualms about the all-sufficiency of methods and assumptions concerning the knowledge process, a few distinguished scientists are disturbed enough to do something about it.¹⁵ Whatever the "new physics" may turn out to be, its beginnings may be traced to drastic attention yet to be given this problem.

A second intentional omission from the descriptive sciences is the world of values, what we have called an expression of the spiritual life. I am not now pressing the older distinction between descriptive and normative, for the reason that both elements appear in all forms of knowledge. What needs to be more fully recognized is the truth to which Kant called attention. After he had finished his first epoch-making *Critique*, he went on to say that the nature of the self, of morality, aesthetics and religion, is not and cannot be handled by the categories designed for nature. Actually the main scientific categories are unequal to that, as Kant's *a priori* principles suggest. But let that pass. Kant undertook to have the same mind construct a new set of categories for the world of values. We may not draw the lines as Kant did, but his main conviction stands as one of the greatest steps taken in modern philosophy.

Apparently we have left the main line of our discussion. But let us see. Moral freedom, we were saying, constitutes a personal achievement. That raised the question of its gift side. Concerning that two ideas have been advanced. One, that heredity contributes to the essential processes of personal

¹⁵ One reference is suggestive enough: *The Philosophy of Science*, by Arthur S. Eddington, The Macmillan Company, 1940.

achievement; second, that experience in its full sweep and at its highest reach taps resources that are cosmic intangibles. These resources contribute also unmistakable gifts to this personal enterprise. And having acknowledged, to the limit of allotted space, that moral freedom has its roots deep in its universe, it is still more relevant to emphasize that moral freedom is a concrete process of achievement, not an imaginary overbelief or a bloodless abstraction.

All experience supplies irrefutable evidence that the human personality grows up in a world that is itself evolving in ways that directly condition the self. Moral personality is constituted a strand in that developing and world-conditioned selfhood. Its nature cannot be exhausted as an object of scientific description, but must be appreciated in valuation. Within its organic relationships, without and within, the moral self is not a transient entity or an aggregation of them, but a self-conditioning and self-transcendent spiritual life. The law or tendency of its developmental ventures may be stated somewhat as follows: the moral self reveals a capacity for self-integration on an ever higher and more coherent level. Continuity ripens toward coherent willing, dependence becomes more thoroughly self-conditioned, discontinuity is transposed into disciplined loyalty to higher ideals, and moral freedom matures through responsible action. In that action an attempt is made to perfect the co-ordination of good personalities in the creation of a diviner civilization that alone satisfies the dream of man and the purpose of God.

Moral ideals, newly reconstituted, supply the thread of personal development and give the most complete expression to the spirit that is freedom. Ideals are more fully appreciated ideas of moral value. They await the keenest insight into the moral situation, the ripest wisdom, the most delicate sensitivity to values, and the most profound loyalties of which a person is capable. But let it not be forgotten that in the initial aspects of freedom, ideas move on to be transformed into ideals, and that both are forms of dynamic energy. Much

of our labored concern with moral motivation is lost motion. Deeper within the moral personality than superficial minds can detect lie the resources of moral initiative, of discipline and of devotion. For on the way forward the moral self not only maintains its stability, but manifolds itself into a cumulative center of self-conditioned life. Moral freedom lives in proportion to that concrete personal achievement.

VI. WITHIN THE MORAL LAW

As a complement to the ideas that moral freedom is a matter of degree and a personal achievement, we encounter a third proposition. *Moral freedom is won in observing the uniform conditions of that spiritual life summarized in the moral law.* In speaking of laws of this kind it would be well to bear in mind two meanings of law. Sometimes we mean an ideal construction of the given structure of reality. Law in this sense means a complete understanding of ultimate relations, the goal of which our actual knowledge always falls short. More often we are obliged to face the limitations of our understanding and speak of law as our tentative hold upon that cosmic structure. That distinction is of prime importance in relation to the problem of moral freedom. Two parties to a discussion on the meaning of law may be relying chiefly on one idea of law, or on the other; more likely, on a mixture of both. One result is unintelligibility.

Beyond that snare lies another. Very often the ideas of natural and moral law are mixed up, and the resulting confusion in turn identified with a general notion about orderliness in the world and human experience. An unmanipulatable orderliness makes up the first condition of sanity, of intelligible explanation, and of the maturity of life which we instinctively covet. If fairies were actual agencies able to reform the organizational structure of experience at will, not one of us would retain our degree of sanity or ever discover either the factuality or the meaning of experience. If arbitrary jinxes ruled in the experimental laboratory, those

sciences would not go out of business for two reasons. One, they never could have been established; second, the mythical scientist would be unable to discover the futility of his activities. A given orderliness pervades the universe. It forms the rock-bottom foundation of human experience. Orderliness signifies the *law of relevancy* of relationship between parts of the universe, and constitutes the wholeness of it.

Along the high road of the human discovery of that relevancy which pervades the universe, man has lived under the most immediate pressure for coming to grips with the world of things, including his own body. Hence for millions of years tradition has grown about the notion of uniform laws of nature. These laws in turn are generalized into natural law. In time the uniformity of nature gets expanded into universality and necessity. Early scientific theory celebrated this marriage in the law of causality, so that to this day men speak about God as a cause. But most significant, perhaps, is the injection of the hypothesis of mechanical causation. Eighteenth century Deism tried to entangle God in such a "law." Irreparable damage was done. Since then religion has been redefined as devotionism, with the object of devotion left unspecified. Skepticism renders that object uncertain in status. However, such turbid sentimentality supplies only one example. Down the line it runs inducing men to assimilate all law to mechanical causality, the second most abstract monument to mathematical logic.

Orderliness is first reduced to mechanical causation. Then in a final stroke of befuddlement the law of causality is stretched to fence in all levels of reality. Such a prejudice, we have seen, underlies the widespread belief about the unreality of moral freedom. But we have also seen that the preponderance of evidence points in another direction. In that direction full recognition is made of orderliness, and for the postulational nature of mechanical causality in its proper sphere of the natural order. Granting these provisions, however, human experience on its ascending levels

also presents other orders of fact. The orderliness of spiritual processes differs from the orderliness of nature. For the limited purposes of descriptive sciences the orderliness of nature may be compressed into the laws of causality. In thinking, appreciation, willing, orderliness operates with a different kind of relevancy. On these levels the future is not shut up in the conceptualized constructions of the given. Continuity, orderliness, and developing tendencies are at work. New beginnings, a higher relevancy, and creativity are also operative. At each level, one kind of explanation proves more appropriate. In the moral life, the principle of teleological explanation supplants causality, in order to do justice to spiritual orderliness.

Once and again it is well to remind ourselves that theories of explanation should be revised in order the better to comprehend the materials of experience. So often this order gets reversed. Some principle of explanation, like causality, is allowed to grow into a hallowed mold. Into that mold experience is jammed without hindrance. The devil of "our hallowed tradition" stalks abroad to obstruct new developments, and cut off the tender shoots of new beginnings.

Moral experience does supply ample illustration of the laws of continuity. The old copybook line had found that kind of relevancy: "He got to going, and couldn't stop." Among the many lies set to music in the elementary moral theorizing of the *Rubaiyat*, the special charm is due in part to the half-truth in words like these:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all the Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

In more recent books like Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* or the writings of Thomas Hardy, the universal theme relives its myriad lives. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for instance, Hardy makes a final comment: "Justice was

done, and the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess." The theme turns up in most unlikely places. Kipling has a tale of *The Broken Men*; men self-banished from their homeland, and haunted with dreams of better days.

Oh God! One sniff of England—
To greet our flesh and blood—
To hear the traffic slurring
Once more through London mud!
Our towns of wasted honor—
Our streets of lost delight—
How stands the old Lord Warden?
Are Dover's cliff still white?

Yes, and no! Dover's cliffs are still white for those who have lived within the law. For all self-exiles nothing could ever make those cliffs white again. Retribution is one language spoken by moral continuity.

In graphic contexts like these moral freedom obtains from one of its aspects a constant reminder that freedom is a matter of degree; its achievement always takes place in the limiting conditions of past experience, and it operates always within the relevancy of universal laws. Under very unfavorable circumstances, provided by the muddleheadedness of a nineteenth century naturalism, Thomas Huxley stepped in advance of his time to point out how moral law appears to reverse the processes of nature. By nature, of course, he meant nature as interpreted by current scientific concepts. It is to be hoped that we can at least catch up at this point with a leader in nineteenth century thought.

VII. KARMA AND JEWISH LEGALISM

Religions uniformly make room for a doctrine of unpardonable sin. That indicates one of the most extreme symbols of continuity in the moral life to be found anywhere. A symbol makes nonsense when mistaken for a literal proposition. But

to those for whom the spirit of poetry still lives, the idea of an unpardonable wrong speaks a solemn truth. Yet no truth, however solemn, should be overworked. This one, out of place, easily degenerates into a fatalism. At the earlier stages an exaggerated role is assigned to the idea of retribution within moral continuity. Greek mythology exemplifies such a temper, for example, in the fate which overtook the crafty and avaricious king of Corinth. Sisyphus was condemned to roll a huge stone up and over a hill. Always at the point when his sentence was about to be completed, some incisive stroke of fate brought the stone atumbling down. Again, and eternally again, he was consigned to make another futile attempt. That picture makes rather attractive the inscription over Dante's Hell: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

The Oriental mind, however, takes the doubtful award for having, in the doctrine of reincarnation, developed one of the most elaborate schemes of moral retribution to be found in the name of religion. It flowers forth in the doctrine of karma. Here degeneration is the word. Karma was not a part of the old Vedic hymns. They breathed an atmosphere of a more simple animistic thought. Karma was introduced in the Upanishads about 600 B.C., where it appeared as the vast secret which solves the problem of human destiny. In time it became the logical foundation of Indian thought, characteristic of Buddhism quite as much as of the Brahman outlook from which the former revolted. Here moral reflection had apparently become "scientific" and externalized the moral life into a series of deeds that can be observed. Karma means "deed." The law of deeds here works out the inexorable law of moral causation. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he inevitably reap unto the last seed.

In this business the individual stands absolutely on his own, abstracted from all others and from the world. All the harvest is gathered by the individual agent himself. He acts in abstraction and accumulates a detached chain that is woven into a net of destiny. Most of the fantasy connected with

previous lives can be laid aside. The principal idea is to explain a man's actual lot. That is accomplished by a fatalistic acceptance of things as they are, and constitutes a partial justification of them. A man's past rolls up like a mountain of mud which at last buries the man. What this notion of moral continuity accomplishes is the elimination of the very moral process it set out to explain. For moral retribution equals the whole of morality, and even then does not belong to the heart of the world process. Karma capitalizes in the all too evident lack of correlation between character and one's happiness in the everyday situation. With singularly unconvincing logic it rationalizes a social system and seeks to reconcile the individual to it, by pushing all responsibility onto the individual's doorstep.

Karma thrives as a gigantic exploitation of the ordinary man's elemental sense of justice. Morality does not countenance an accidental succession of events, but exemplifies an orderly continuity of life. So much is very plain. This truth gets perverted by karma to mean that whatever happens is just. Its disguise functions all the more effectively because morality is equated into terms of material well-being and physical suffering. These are matters of vast concern. Yet they hardly make up the whole theme of morality. Its appeal rests principally upon two grounds. One lies in the fact of lawful continuity in moral experience; the other makes concession to belated minds who harp on the apparent moral indifference of nature. One redeeming feature belongs to the everlasting credit of karma. Its excessively rigid logic stands as an everlasting protest against the fake potencies of priestcraft in all religions.

The law background of the Christian religion operates as a leaven in the same direction, toward a misconceived continuity in moral experience. One of the influential conventional conclusions in the Christian church runs to the effect that a system of unchanging divine decrees forms the base of the moral life. Hence sin has been generally conceived as

a transgression of the Law, and righteousness a conformity to its requirements. Defective theories of Scriptural authority have accelerated the pace toward a distorted idea of morality. Since God has revealed His laws in the Scriptures, His will must be obeyed. All of them rest upon divine sanction. The Scriptural summons is for obedience. Wherefore, it is alleged, that priest, prophet, and church councils should promulgate interpretations of the Law. When Paul wrote that Christians do not live "under the law" but under grace, this view holds that he must have meant moral laws as well as the ceremonial law. All this arises in the name of a more profound legal base for moral obligation in the will of God. Even Jesus intended, it is held, to enact a new legal regime by a re-establishment of the *moral* requirements of the Mosaic code, while abrogating the *ceremonial* aspects of it. Wherefore the Gospel records contain very considerable evidence that his early interpreters were of a divided mind on the question. In both branches of the modern Christian church, the "Laws of God" are made fundamental, and then left conveniently vague in meaning. Historic Christianity, in short, has been widely conceived on one side in legalistic terms. Accordingly an irrevocable past hangs over the Christian's defenseless head.

Fortunately there has developed within Christianity another emphasis. Over against a moral outlook built upon obedience and a prescribed set of duties, an accent has developed for responsible spontaneity and sincere goodness. Here the moral requirements are not superimposed upon the agent, but appeal to his more rational nature as the quintessence of wisdom and the sole condition of sanity. Duty ceases to be drudgery, for it is the free and grateful acknowledgment of new light upon the moral situation. Loyalty constitutes the only response in agreement with self-respect. Two excellent historical sources for this emphasis are available. One is the Pauline doctrine of the freedom of the spirit. To the Roman converts he addressed this startling

idea about passing from under the law to a dispensation of grace.¹⁶ Here is the "law of liberty" in which a man walks after the spirit.¹⁷ His listeners must have heard in amazement this revolutionary gospel.

Jesus provides a second authentic example for shifting from a legalistic perspective on the moral life toward a characterization of its unique quality of inner spirit. Moral continuity does not signify a hopeless finality about any man's past. Over against the hopelessness of conformity to an established law he set the vitality of a free spiritual adventure. "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." Those who had been going through the torture of soul involved in trying to keep rapidly multiplying "laws," yet never finding peace in their uncertainty about some unknown offense, knew what Jesus meant. No wonder the sincere common people heard him gladly. On the contrary, he must have struck terror into the hearts of the "good" people whose ears had been attuned to laws, oral and written. "Hear me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man."¹⁸ For many another tortured soul, however, the insight which undergirds words like these has been the bearer of light and joy. At the deepest reach of moral experience stands not an inexorable law, human or divine, but a free spirit of moral integrity which transcends our conceptual finalities.

VIII. LAW BACKGROUND OF THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

The full weight of our religious heritage has fallen on the reverse side. Pharisaism was the traditional name for it. It exemplifies that disposition in its most negative and vicious form. Pharisaism designates an insidious disease to which the human spirit is exposed. It is not of a people or even a re-

¹⁶ Rom. VI, 14. Compare also V, 17, 18, 21; VII, 4, 6; Gal. IV, 21; V, 18, etc.

¹⁷ II Cor. III, 17-18.

¹⁸ Mark VII, 14-15. See entire chapter, and compare Matt. XV, 1-20.

ligious sect. What happens is that a distorted view of moral continuity becomes sanctified by religious bigotry. Jesus faced it among his own people, but there can be no doubt about the universal bearing of what he did and said about it. That is what created enmity between him and the "good" people of his time. He objected not only to their practices, but more especially to their principles. Their foundational landmarks were wrong, not simply their halting allegiance to them. In the end they resolved their deep-lying disagreement with Jesus by arranging a crucifixion. That crucifixion is repeated daily among Christians. Not, be it remembered, because we fail in living up to our profession. Christians daily enact that treachery against themselves as well as against him, because our basic perspective in principle falsifies the moral process.

What, then, is Pharisaism? *First*, righteousness means rightness of action when measured by laws of a particular tradition. These laws are taken as final editions of the divine will. But their worst defect comes from the whole idea of righteousness as obeying prescriptions concerning action. This leaves one-half of morality out of account, and so misconstrues the whole. "Cleanse the inside of the cup," said Jesus. Motives, the springs of action, are an essential part of the morally good life. Pharisaic morality has become thus externalized, into a string of dead and irrevocable deeds. On this view its cardinal principle is a destiny of actions, based upon a misreading of moral continuity into a fatalism of works. *Second*, Pharisaism grows cocksure of itself. Good Pharisees need no physician. "Physician heal thyself," that is what they always say. By observing the law, they are fated for salvation, self-elected and self-certified. *Third*, Pharisees are skeptical about the possibility of new beginnings in all who stand without the law. Sinners was the self-revealing epithet which they once applied to some of their moral superiors who failed to keep the law. In their eyes Jesus had courted disgrace by associating with these outcasts. Hence

also the argument that he "set at naught the law." In fact, Pharisees believe more in the fatalism of the law than in the righteousness of God. Believing thus so wholeheartedly, they cannot have respect or hope for men. *Finally*, as a consequence, the legalizers become indifferent to the fate of other men, so long as they feel themselves secure. There is special point in the thrust by which Jesus introduced the immortal parable of the Pharisee and the publican.¹⁹ He addressed himself "unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at naught." "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself. . . . But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me, a sinner." No wonder the kindred souls of all the self-righteous look upon this passage as an emendation, unworthy of Jesus. It demands nothing less than a full face about.

IX. CONVERSION

That face about lies with the initiative of the complementary truth sought after in the religious doctrine of conversion. But the truth involves a complete reinterpretation of the moral process. That cost comes too high. Therefore, the conventional notions about conversion, about new beginnings in the moral life, go limping. In getting off to a bad start conversion as commonly conceived gravitates about an emotional upheaval and resettlement, not about a new moral commitment. If the moral commitment follows, that is good. But how could it, with moral ideals left to uncritical common-sense opinion? Among the illuminated there is great concern in these psychological days about the converse side of the conversion process. We must, they say, study the emotional conditioning of the individual. In just the right devotional surroundings the required emotional stress and realignment can be directed. Yet all the chants of the king's

¹⁹ Luke XVIII, 9.

satellites cannot bring moral regeneration to the experimental subject. One quite sufficient reason is that moral insight dawns upon those with eyes prepared to see. Emotional patterns correlate with moral insight, but do not completely produce it.

In the second place, a legalistic perspective of a human past demands on occasion a complete discontinuity in the moral life. Such a discontinuity is too often assumed in a religious approach. The assumption stands self-condemned, on one basic ground. Moral continuity, we have seen, expresses a fundamental law. Presumably that law stands as part of the divine economy. It is inconceivable that a God who is either wise or good could reverse Himself, to accommodate superficial insight into life's most significant ranges. The demand arises first as a by-product of a false interpretation of moral experience, and is fostered by a cheap desire to exalt the place of religion in human life. Neither ground can form part of a rational outlook. The only sensible alternative involves the abandonment of the involved point of view.

In the third place, any compromise on this false view on moral continuity and freedom has practical consequences of a serious nature. It is the one sure way to nullify the resources for moral-spiritual regeneration to which every man is constantly exposed. God has not left any man without witness of His righteous spirit, but the witness requires a mediating language. For one thing, the discontinuity preachment ignores the power of past conditioning and so prepares the way for successive failures, which become more enervating with repetition. I recall one memorable example. A pastor of an outstanding church in a large city found himself the victim of alcoholism. He had a notable record in the ministry. For many years under his leadership the congregation and church had held a place of city-wide renown. Personally, he was the best-known and the most influential Christian in the city inside the church and in civic circles. One distin-

guished congregation of his denomination in New York City called him to be their pastor, leaving the naming of his salary to his own choice. His people believed in him. They sent him, with a physician, to the mountains to recuperate. After nearly a year, he returned to his church. As an entree he allowed to be published in the leading metropolitan daily a front page story of his determination to come back. His words were alive with sincerity, with grace, and with dignity. After approximately a year he was sent away, under a doctor's care, to take another rest. He never came back to any church. The last few months of his life were spent as an obscure tent evangelist on the outskirts of his beloved city. Yet at no time did he or his church officials, or the thousands of Christians who loved him, manifest marked concern about a cleansed environment for him or his less conspicuous brethren. Those were the days when the good old gospel of individual regeneration was preached. But not even the ruination of a most distinguished victim could shake a Pharisaic confidence.

When religious conversion holds together the truth of moral continuity and freedom within the moral law it moves in the direction of the highest service that Christianity has undertaken. In a world where men were cheap, cheaper than property and political aggrandizement; in a military world where the male child was prized and hated because he represented military might; at a time when hope had been almost smothered in the heart of the common man; in a world where religious institutions were exploiting the people for religion's sake—Jesus came preaching the good news of a rule of God, and the common people heard him gladly. Two reasons for this surpass all others. First, he lived a life of moral integrity which offered to them irrefutable evidence on the depth and quality of his own moral perspective. Second, his incarnate truth was good news of hope for new life for all men, including those in whom the flame of freedom burned uncertainly.

X. NEW MORAL BEGINNINGS

The story of the temptation of Jesus admirably presents the crux of our problem.²⁰ It illustrates magnificently the moral freedom achieved by a morally good man. The temptation seems too impressive and real to have been a record of a single incident. Not once, but many times these problems must have confronted him. A young man is trying to find his vocation. Questions bound forward. What will happen to you? What do you want? How will you get it? The past rushes in with its demanding terms: family ties and obligations, religious traditions, social distresses, political chaos, the limitations of dire poverty in an exceedingly poor country, family status, hereditary treasures, irrepressible advice from friends. All this, and freedom too. The order in the Lukean account is suggestive. *First*, what is to become of you? Look out for number one. Feed yourself. Self-preservation is the first law. To all this Jesus answers: "Man shall not live by bread alone." In the end, human life is limited only by a man's free response to the gifts of God's spirit. Bread is good and necessary, but bread is not enough. I am a man. A *second* question follows immediately. What do you really want? The world would make a goodly possession. No doubt you can have it, on the right conditions. How much will you give? What price glory? But the swift, sure moral perception of Jesus saw through that. There is only one kind of glory. Upon that glory all other value depends. I will exercise my inalienable choice. I want the supreme values first. That means God to me. *Finally*, how do you propose to obtain your dominant desire? What instruments will you use? Men are gullible. You need the co-operation of others. How do you propose to get their help? You can make them your servants by a spectacular show of power. Cast yourself down from the temple. That will make you a miracle worker. Lady luck may favor you just now. But, asks Jesus, has his majesty considered that unless power serves a righteous purpose, it is

²⁰ Matt. IV, 1-11; Luke IV, 1-13.

only the instrument of petty tyrants? Tyranny lives out its day briefly. Day after tomorrow the tyrants and their ilk depart. Ultimate power belongs to God alone, because He makes it an appropriate servant. End and means are inseparable. Goal and instruments qualify each other. "And when the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season." That was a full day's work, even for the devil.

The story is worth reading again. It pictures an abiding continuity in life and through the world. Through life's veins course both good and evil in a bewildering mixture. Sometimes its intricate tangles makes the head swirl. In that incongruous mass lives grow strong and clear-eyed. Some are swallowed up and enslaved to futility. Jesus lived! In a hard day he lived well. He achieved the miracle of moral freedom. Every step he took was contested. There is no magic here, just the miracle of morally good willing. The environment can destroy, and heredity choke a person, but so long as a man is alive, just that long will he make choices and organize his world. Those functions constitute his personality. That reconstructive initiative with respect to what is offered belongs to him as a prerogative of human personality. Call the outcome his second nature, if you will. Or, say simply, society and civilization. Willing does not operate in a vacuum or produce a vast nothing. Intelligent willing, that is at once sincere and thorough, means free willing. And free willing is always relevant willing. *Freedom means relevancy in thought and action.* The secret of it, as Bernard Bosanquet has so finely said, lies with "what works *in* the mind, and *on* the situation."²¹

Temptation is a negative word. Jesus brings out the other side. That side illuminates the exercise of moral freedom in the discipline of a human soul. And having made the good discovery of disciplined freedom he followed through on the divine resources of human life. Those resources are avail-

²¹ *Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 102.

able to every son of God, on exactly the same conditions. Jesus is not a phantom to mock us, but a living embodiment of moral freedom to inspire us. Paul the Christian also preached the gospel of the new-found liberty of a slave to Jesus Christ.

That brings us face to face with the incessant question. It has already been raised, and partly answered. It is this: can the freedom of new beginnings, within the structure of human experience which is morality, make secure the stability of goodness within spontaneity? Can the spirit of freedom be trusted? Moral freedom has shown itself to be the most precious gift of God, and the most perilous. Thinkers of every time and age have loved it, and feared its leadership. A nineteenth century poet, half-liberated from the terror of the mechanism of causality, sang its praise, with misgiving:²²

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad hearts! Without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work, and know it not:
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast.

That anxiety is unfounded wherever moral freedom is genuine. Freedom has cumulative system and sticking power for its goal. Moral freedom finds stability by disciplined insight, not by mere wishing or vague feeling after a something that dwells on a beautiful isle of somewhere. Strictly speaking the moral law is not a law, because it is something more substantial. It stands for a spiritual order, with a majestic orderliness all its own. That structural order, at once more unyielding and more responsive, constitutes the highest moral freedom as a relevancy to perfect goodness. It is a

²² William Wordsworth, *Ode to Duty*.

concretely personal freedom, gradually won through a dawning insight into the nature of things. Freedom is both gift and task, liberty and responsibility, a continuity with ever new beginnings that, like the good will of Jesus, holds the key of self-direction in its own hand.

Artistry in Christian Character

ARTISTRY suggests painstaking achievement that is guided by a discriminating sensitivity to values. And now that Christian means for us an ideal of truth, of comprehensive regard for facts, of valid interpretation, we can surmise what confronts us in this chapter. One thing is sun-clear. Achieving the qualities of Christian character is far from a process of self-decoration. The virtues make up the essential warp and woof of moral selfhood. In the nature of the case most Biblical material will function secondarily. Here is a situation in which many are called, but mighty few can be chosen. How could it be otherwise? With all our advantages, can we even compare favorably with the men who live in those pages? Before we can get counted "among those present," Christian must be assigned a relative meaning, indicating that Christian character is a matter of degree.

I. PSYCHOLOGY OF MORAL SELFHOOD

For several chapters now attention has been given to what might be called the law of deepening moral resources. It seeks to generalize the movement of the focal point of ethical thought from the *prima-facie* deed toward the innermost recesses of motive. We are already familiar with that law of progression in our ordinary language. Words pair off to handle the twofold nature of moral experience: conduct and character, act and agent, law and virtue, commandment and clean heart, "Hell is paved . . ." and "As a man thinketh . . ." Schools of ethical thought are formed about an emphasis on one side or the other.

In this chapter on the virtues we will continue to blast away at the inward side. Already we have followed a drive toward the inwardness of goodness, the education of conscience, and the nature of moral freedom. Now we have pene-

trated deeply toward the moral self, and seek to discover more about its innermost structure. What are the basic threads in the total pattern called moral personality? As the moral self continues its functions, what fundamental characteristics does it manifest? What are the virtues? How are they related, to each other and to the whole self? Through what strategy are these essential qualities achieved?

Not a few psychologists meet us at this point with a curt reminder that the moralist should come to a halt. Any further attempt to advance should be reconsidered. Bluntly, that would assume the form of trespassing. Both the anthropologist and the sociologist have agreed to grant to the psychologist a bailiwick of his own. Henceforth the moralist must consult psychology for a scientific basis on this phase of morality. The warning is quite impressive, but not conclusive. It is impressive because on its inward side especially morality has its psychological foundations. All of its light is needed and should be welcomed. The summons is not conclusive, for several good reasons. For one thing, the moralist was here long before modern psychologies were dreamed of, and some moralists, Plato and Aristotle for instance, did a fairly good job. For a second reason, when the psychologist tries to play all the instruments in the band, he becomes hopelessly confused and does some absurd performances. One typical example must suffice. A recent volume on psychology contains a representative chapter on "Science Discovers a Basis for Morality."¹

For brevity's sake, the upshot of this standpoint can be put this way: ethics is radically misconstrued, and morality seriously mutilated. Obviously the author sets out with a preconceived notion of what a science must be. Therefore, ethics must be trimmed to order. It is done! Morality is included in the sciences by two steps:² First, the goal of human endeavor is deduced from "the observation of man's strivings in

¹ R. B. Cattell, *Psychology and the Religious Quest*, 1938.

² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

the general biological setting"; second, "the specific laws of behaviour which will best enable men to approach this goal" are calculated from the principal results supplied by sociology, biology, economics and psychology.

From this station on there are four steps. *First*, the goal aspect of ethics, the problem of what constitutes the norm of goodness, is settled by assumption. That makes it easy for ethics, to be relieved of its most perplexing question. A quotation is necessary to give credence to this procedure: "The main contention of a rational approach to morals is that we set up *some* agreed objective for society as a whole, and derive our moral laws for individuals in the way which best assures society's reaching that goal."³ *Second*, ethics is accordingly reduced to the task of devising a technique of direction and control.⁴ *Third*, these two conclusions derive from a restricted biotic conception of man. Almost unawares the author recurs to "the instinctive urges" of man in his general biological setting. *Fourth*, this abstract concept of man depends in turn upon a doctrine of nature as seen through the concepts of the sciences. Science is here a caldron into which man is submerged for reconditioning.

Within this setting a scientific morality issues into a superficial and self-contradicting altruism. Its virtues consist in altruistic qualities such as "sympathy, unselfishness, self-sacrifice, and the capacity for enthusiastic co-operation."⁵ The whole procedure calls to mind the half-cynical comment of another scientific moralist: "One of the conspicuous things about the history of ethical theory is the consistency with which it issues in an enforcement and amplifying of the more dignified and respectable moral precepts of the ethicist's own age and condition of society."⁶ But the date is on the moralist, not on ethics.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91 ff.

⁶ A. K. Rogers, *Morals in Review*, p. 447.

II. FOUR LEVELS OF VALUE

Psychological studies are not exhausted by any one representative type. There are many notable trends in psychology. Besides, psychological studies need not be misused in an all-sufficient manner. A psychology of ethics need not pretend to be the whole of ethics, nor even the core of it. In working out the standard of highest value and the foundational conditions upon which its self-integration depends, there is enough work for all the relevant sciences to do in cooperation. The critical evaluation part of the work belongs to ethics, not to psychology. That is why integration requires to be supplemented, at the level where the eddies of personality are to be focalized.

Viewed genetically there are *four* levels in moral personality to be considered. In an ascending scale these levels may be designated as follows: elementary desire, social good, common good, highest good. The simplest and most elementary concept of value in purely biotic terms is the *satisfaction of desire*. This makes a good point of departure. Desire satisfaction is a simple and fairly intelligible idea. Whatever satisfies human desire comes to have value, or is good. Even the cave man knows the good of expending his energies on what materializes in objects such as food or shelter to satisfy his elemental needs. Consequently, the generally accepted notion that good is what tends to promote the conservation of life looks more toward the biological foundations of value. However, the psychological definition of good as whatever satisfies desire gets into trouble. Desires are not entities, but rather the transient expression of some aspect of the whole organic self. Desires cannot be put on the spot or conclusively located. They shuttle hither and yon, flit back and forth, and escalate up and down. No satisfactory idea of value can be obtained through orientation with such an acute variable as desire. Practically considered also, an attempt to live on desire satisfactions will thwart nearly every

element of rationality, as the Cyrenaics and Epicureans discovered long ago, and as many a modern roué continues to confirm.

The second level, therefore, seeks stabilization through a disciple of desire for *social values*. Here the educative function of group domination has long been getting in its licks. Whether one considers the primitive group or the child in the family, the disciplinary needs of the individual have been anticipated. All along through the school, clubs, churches, industrial organization, political groupings, the din about group welfare and "social" good keeps up. In the morning of creation was group value; at the close of the day of judgment group value will be on hand; and in between the charm of social good will parade as the voice of the gods. The vast majority of humankind will never be constituted self-respecting personalities. Their lot never permits them to emerge to that level of human living. With that goal dimly in sight, they will stumble into a hole six foot by three, walking dust consecrated only by the social good.

The sting of all this lies with the ambiguity in the term social. I doubt if any word in any known language is as merciless in its tyranny. All experience, of course, is social in many senses. Why, then, should we single out morality and truss it into the bonds of social good? Some good reasons doubtless lie back of this hallowed tradition. Offhand, four of them come up for acknowledgment: *First*, morally good living depends all along the way upon the elements of stability and continuity of co-ordinated living. Custom, morals, supply each generation with necessary stepping stones. *Secondly*, progress in the realization of goodness in human personality is possible only in the give and take of mutuality. We advance life co-operatively or disintegrate together. *Thirdly*, moral goodness is sharable. In principle, what is morally good for one person should be made available for every person, so far as possible on the basis of equal oppor-

tunity. *Finally*, since the highest values are gained only by sharing, and must be shared in order to be retained, and when shared they multiply by division, they are universal—trans-social. Any person who has ever viewed the Tetons, or some grand canyon, or listened to a great symphony, or experienced a great friendship, has verified this fourth level of moral goodness.

Why, then, do we not come to grips with the chameleon meanings of social? When we come to an air pocket in our thinking, why do we glibly say “social” and go on? You can answer that one. Here are some things to consider. Concrete thinking on experience is hard work. Teaching is an honored profession. Everybody is doing it, or wants a chance at it. Mediocrity has inordinate ambitions. Prudence insulates itself by its own kind in school, in business, in church, in politics. People who know what moral goodness means have important work to do. In short, the good, they say, is a *common good*, where common is debased to mean ordinary.

A better meaning, however, is in the offing when plain men speak of the common good. Perhaps the mind which wrestles with the problem of the common good entertains two not altogether incompatible convictions. On one hand, goodness, virtue, or the distinctive excellence of human life must be inward and personally experienced. On the other hand, the good must have a common denominator and be shared by all. That dilemma, in the history of ethical thought, has assumed many forms. One of the most extensive expressions shaped up the somewhat artificial conflict of egoism and altruism. It is commonly assumed that man is ruled by self-interest, and the problem of goodness is to get him to take an interest in other persons like himself. Accordingly, goodness means consideration for others and badness equals selfishness. Belated psychologists of our own time chime in with the assurance that the child may be said “literally to be in love with himself.”⁷ On the other side of the dichotomy some

⁷ *The Christian Century*, July 22, 1936, p. 1013.

moralists have discovered that the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was an individual-social affair.⁸

At this third level of the common good historical analysis has wavered between the apparently personal character of the morally good and its sharability in making for a common welfare. One of the simpler solutions was proposed by Augustine, where the common good is formed by a compromised or additive good. The Greeks resolved all difficulties by holding on to the standpoint where the individual is kept subordinate to the group and contributory to it. That notion is still widely accepted. A third position maintains that a strictly common human good is impossible, because competition between the members of society is inevitable. That view was lately argued with considerable cogency by Henry Sidgwick in his *Lectures on Thomas Hill Green*.⁹ He shares with F. H. Bradley the idea that the dualism appears at every stage of the moral life and can be overcome only where ethics passes over into religion. A fourth proposal finds a voice in Spinoza who followed a line laid out by the Stoics. The real basis for conflict lies in the rule of passion as over against the authority of reason. If only men acted in obedience to reason, they would discover that "the highest good of all" those who follow virtue is also a common good. Kant went on to ground the common good in the completely disinterested good will. This good will lives in expression. "Act so that the maxim of thy conduct . . ." was Kant's insistent word. T. H. Green¹⁰ developed the doctrine of the clean heart in Kant by defining it as "the settled disposition on each man's part to make the most and best of humanity in his own person and in the person of others."

Green leads us over the threshold into the fourth level, beyond the common good to *the highest good*. He was enriched as was Kant before him, by a Christian heritage. At

⁸ Gregory Vlastos, "Jesus' Conflict with the Pharisees," in *Christendom*, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 86-100.

⁹ See p. 71.

¹⁰ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Par. 244.

this level, therefore, we are brought face to face with the original moralist of all who make this highest adventure. The highest or supreme good includes several salient characteristics in a single unity, of which social and common are only lesser parts. They may be summarized under four heads. The *summum bonum* comprises in one whole, *the human, the social, the personal, and the universal* good. In order then, the highest moral good is human in a *triple* sense. (1) The good is human in that it comports with the experience of creatures of our order. It is not for angels, gods, or devils, but for the welfare of actual humankind. (2) The good is humanitarian. At its core lives considerateness for the actual condition in which persons find themselves. Circumstances alter cases just in the right proportion. Moral goodness is relevant to concrete personalities. (3) Moral goodness is human in that it is profoundly inward. These different ideas of the humanness of the highest good are written all over the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He was always discovering moral distinction in neglected people, most of them social and religious outcasts. His concern for children bears incontrovertible witness to his idea of goodness. Children came first in a long list of the "least of these."¹¹ He located the great divide perilously near to the issue of considerateness for those ordinarily not counted.¹² Persons stood over against things, with things in an instrumental servant relation. A rich young man who had inverted this relationship, he advised to "go, sell and give to the poor, and then come and follow me."¹³ The Kingdom of God trenches near to where the nobodies are forced to live, especially if they hunger and thirst after righteousness.¹⁴ And once he revived a rhetorical question Plato had used, "What should a man give in exchange for a human soul, his own or that of anyone else? How could that be profitable?"¹⁵

¹¹ Read Matt. XI, 25-30.

¹² *Ibid.*, XXV, 31 ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, XIX, 16 ff.

¹⁴ Matt. V, 6; Luke IV, 24.

¹⁵ Mark VIII, 36, *et passim*.

In the second place, the highest good is social. Some of the counterfeit meanings of social in this connection have been set out. The unfinished task has to do with positive aspects. The supreme good is socially sharable in at least four important respects. (1) The accident of birth, race, economic condition or social status cannot count as a barrier against any man. The author of Luke appears to make a specialty of bringing out the universalism of Jesus. One of the best known of all his teachings comes under the title of "The Good Samaritan."¹⁶ A certain man fell among thieves. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road; they saw he was robbed already. A nameless Samaritan of a despised race is made the hero of the parable. That innocent-looking and casual phrase to the effect that "the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans" escapes us. What it, in fact, says is that no moral obligation bridged the chasm between them. In the perspective of Jesus that kind of restrictionism makes nonsense. (2) On the contrary, the kingdom is open to every last man, on a condition that in the providence of God every last man can meet. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness of spirit," because nobody is turned away; there is enough to go around. Besides, goodness enough impinges upon every last man to whet his appetite. God stands vindicated on both counts. God saw to it that goodness is potentially sharable for all men. (3) More than that, goodness cannot be incarcerated, but lives in socialized expression. It multiplies by division. That makes bad mathematics, but that is a reflection upon mathematical atomism. Human lives are members one of another, and the higher they climb in common responsibilities, in cooperative effort, and in mutual regard, the more they transcend the lower levels of social, the meaning of social deepens.

In the third place, the highest good is personal. It is personal for the very good reason that values are genuinely real

¹⁶ Luke X, 25-37.

only when they are interwoven into a personality. Goodness is only an abstract set of conditions until it obtains the meaning of goodness in a man. Moralists have shied from this, because for several generations the bogey of scientific method has eliminated "the personal element." Hence, what is personal must be emotional reaction, preference, prejudice. Values that are purely relative to the self cannot be comprehended in scientific terms. Such reasoning is fallacious. It plays on tricky words like personal, preference, and relative. When "the personal equation" is eliminated, it makes all the difference what is meant by personal equation. Here it is easy to throw out the baby with the bath. In this case it is possible for the baby to grow up and learn to make disinterested moral judgments. He can do this only because the judger is more thoroughgoingly personal than ever. A second line of foolish talk has developed. Some one defined personality as the capacity for fellowship. Very well, so far as it goes. In so far as it reduces personality to social, it is of one piece with the patter of the father of all lies.

Finally, the *summum bonum* constitutes a true universal. Universal means general, but much more besides. Universality drives hard toward validity, not general acceptability. White lying enjoys general acceptability among us. In fact it assumes the coveted attitude of hauteur. That long buried but clever envoy who wittily observed: "An ambassador is an honest man, sent abroad to lie for the good of his country," sounds positively musical. But a lie remains a lie, no matter how generally acceptable or how white. Consider another example. Among the most general civil and moral laws is the one forbidding murder. It is not any too generally observed, but "Thou shalt not kill," is as universal as any human principle whatsoever. A valid moral principle is a true universal, in that it digs to the foundations of human experience to explore the permanent sources of goodness. It is above all good and then social, not vice versa.

III. THE CARDINAL EXCELLENCES

The highest good for human life validates itself in the concrete virtues or excellences of personality. Moral reflection began in dead earnest with Socrates in the fifth century before our era. The Greeks used *Arete* or virtue in an inclusive sense, to designate that quality which enables an agent to do his work well. Many outstanding achievements of Greek culture glorified the intelligence of man. Whenever the Greek saw order, he sought a law. Where he found law, he celebrated reason. Nevertheless Aristotle opens his *Nicomachē Ethicē* with the observation that man's distinctive function is concerned with that good in relation to which all other goods are instrumental. That end is the abundant life. In the interest of increasing our understanding, moralists have tentatively abstracted outstanding functions of the moral agent under the name of cardinal virtues. They are *four*: Moderation, Courage, Wisdom and Justice.

The *Dialogues* of Plato present the earliest of outstanding discussions on the nature of virtue. From what has been said one would expect to find the term virtue alternating in meaning. At first it has the broad significance of goodness in general, and then it is used to designate particular excellences. In true empirical fashion Plato derives the virtues from human nature. According to the current psychology the human soul had three main parts: appetite, higher emotions, and reason. Society is the individual "writ large." Virtues are functions of the human soul. At the lower level, appetite sets out in quest for bodily satisfactions. The corresponding virtue is *sophrosyne*, moderation, temperance, or self-control. The etymology of the word is most illuminating. It is compounded of a verb meaning to save or preserve, and a noun meaning mind. So the virtue which presides over appetite, literally seeks to preserve the mind or rational nature of man. And reason to the Greek marks the distinctive nature which sets man apart from his organic cousins.

Reason working as moderation is a basic expression of law,

measure, proportion, symmetry, propriety, self-control. Its nearest opposite is *hubris* or insolence, and comes about the nearest the Greek ever arrived at sin. Self-control underlies all other virtues; its deficiency is the greatest ignorance, while its exercise makes a man the friend of God. Plato comes near making self-control the whole of virtue, and the history of man's struggle to rid himself of the excess baggage of sensuality nearly justifies that stress. There are more petty slaves today through the lack of this virtue than at any time in the world's history. Many of the most bestial forms of slavery have gone, but theimps of Satan are working overtime furbishing up new varieties and advertising them. We are prepared to exploit human personalities to the last limit of technical legality. In the state where the masses rule, says Plato, where appetite constitutes three-fourths of life, the processes of disorganization work to perfection. This story of moral disintegration makes the eighth book of the *Republic* one of the most dramatic in all literature.

Just above appetite lives *Thymoides*, the untranslatable "spirited element" which I shall call the higher emotions. Its specific virtue is courage. By nature the spirited element in the soul is allied with reason. But the soul of man inhabits a body. That creates an everlasting battle, with appetite and reason the main contenders. This struggle Plato pictures in an earlier dialogue in an unforgettable parable.¹⁷ A chariot in which reason rides is drawn by two steeds. One is a beautiful high-bred white horse, the epitome of sensitivity and beauty. The other is a lumbering, thick-necked brute, with a color as black as his untamed passions. The black horse takes the bit in his teeth and lunges forward. For a time he drags the white steed and the driver along. But after prolonged struggle in which the driver seesaws the bit loose, the charioteer brings him under control. Not, however, until his mouth is bleeding and his strength spent. Then both appetite and higher emotions go ahead under the

¹⁷ *Phaedrus* 248 ff.

complete control of reason. *Courage* is the operation of reason in the emotional ranges.

Corresponding to reason, of course, is the virtue of *wisdom*. Reason in its very nature exemplifies the principle of measure, proportion, symmetry. In its operation comprehensiveness, concentration, and balance, function in just the right proportion. That assures perspective and sanity. Reason not only directs itself but supplies insight and guidance for the other parts of the self. Its discriminating judgment penetrates to the marrow of every value which lays claim to attention. Reason merges with love of the highest kind, a love that is particularly critical about its beloved. It aims at perfection in the beloved and so is without jealousy. It is to be carefully distinguished from common varieties of love. They lack discrimination, are devoted equally to the material and the spiritual, disregard the means employed to gain their end, and know not how to distinguish good from evil.¹⁸ Reason, on the contrary, having banished the tyranny of appetite, and all fear from the emotions, is clear-minded, cordial, balanced, well-disposed toward the truth of things, expresses its regard for freedom in following the scale of values ever higher, expecting the whole soul to be transformed by its devotion. The goal of human life, you know, is *homoiosis tō theō*, becoming like unto God so far as that is humanly possible. Such is the everlasting possession of the good.¹⁹ Reason therefore performs a double function in a soul: self-restraint and self-fulfillment.

Plato binds the moral ascent together with a threefold chord that gives the fourth cardinal virtue, *justice*. Reason performs the supervising function over every part of the soul. Its special virtue of wisdom operates throughout the moral life, and even makes self-control and courage possible. Finally, the keystone virtue of justice seals the harmony of the particular virtues into one perfect unity in diversity. In

¹⁸ *Symposium* 181b.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 210 ff. Cf. *Rep.* V, 490b; X, 611e-612a, *et passim*.

the symphony of the moral life, self-control signifies healthy mindedness; courage unites aggressiveness and endurance, a combination which makes a man unconquerable;²⁰ wisdom loves truth above all things, and so alone may discover the supreme good, which is "the true source of all right and beauty in everything; it is the light of the visible world and the parent of the lord of light in it; in the intellectual world it is the direct source of reason and truth."²¹ The good which is the center of all justice includes three distinct ideas: first, it is the object of all rational desire; secondly, it is the principle which makes the world a rational order and knowledge possible; thirdly, it informs the creative life of the order of nature. The good is none other than the divine reason.²²

IV. THE GOODNESS IN LOVE

Plato's treatment of the cardinal virtues in the *Republic* makes clear that they interfuse and mutually qualify each other. The truth in that contention is not recognized widely enough. The unitary nature of the self has with us been pictured as an achievement. And so the language we use gains in significance whether we speak of personal integration, social adjustment, moral equilibrium, economic co-operation, political unity, or of salvation. The accent rightly falls upon a resultant. With the gearing of these processes of human growth we are vitally concerned. Is it not possible to supplement our insight in these matters by digging at their deeper logical foundations? What permanent conditions enable us to deal thus effectively with the stream of human events?

In an earlier dialogue, the *Protagoras*, Plato had raised the question whether virtue or goodness is one or many? His mind had evidently moved toward a sharp distinction, in which goodness means a quality of spirit that makes a man's life, and not what happens to him. Moreover, in living the

²⁰ *Republic* IV, 444b. The early Christians developed this combination magnificently.

²¹ *Republic* VII, 517b-c.

²² *Philebus*, 22c.

good life a knowledge of the highest good appears to be all-important. Or, shall we expect to stumble into the highest way of life? Knowledge and virtue are thus linked together, as instrument and goal. But that relationship runs deeper still. Only if virtue or goodness is logically unitary can it be intelligently comprehended and taught.

Otherwise, goodness must be left to heredity, to chance, or to an inscrutable Providence. None of these alternatives can be seriously considered. For one thing the very continuance, not to say improvement, of social life depends upon the virtues. Hence Zeus gave the command, "The man who is not able to share reverence and justice must be put to death as the plague of the state."²³ Another consideration lies in that common assumption that every person should profess virtue. Whether he has it or not. Society has accordingly instituted schemes of punishment and laws to promote justice, which indicates that goodness requires nurture. In fact everybody teaches morality. Beginning with childhood a man's whole life is confronted with moral admonitions, up to and including the impact of the laws of civilized society. The best evidence that these efforts are not senseless is the decency at the core of all social life that preserves it. Here the humanist waxes eloquent:

I would have you consider that he whom you adjudge to be the most unjust of all those nurtured by the laws and institutions of civilized society is really a just man and a veritable spring of justice compared with men who lack education, or courts of justice, or laws, or any agency which constrains them toward the practice of virtue—with the savages, for instance, whom Pherecrates displayed last year at the Lenaeon festival. Had you actually lived in a society such as the man-haters in his chorus, you would be delighted to associate with Eurybates and Phrynondas, and longingly would your soul yearn for the depravity of this community.²⁴

That argument is unanswerable.

²³ *Ibid.*, 322d.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 327c-d.

Protestant Christians especially have a tradition which ill prepares them to understand the virtues. More immediately we have been taught to belittle knowledge in relation to virtue. Socrates, we are assured, was completely mistaken about the connection between knowledge and virtue. Somehow religious faith takes care of morality, and relieves the Christian of responsibility for gaining a solid moral understanding. Besides, if we are modern, Schopenhauer has assured us that *velle non discitur*. To all of which the reply is forthcoming, if willing cannot be taught, there must be something wrong about the *kind* of knowledge involved. That is precisely our case. For long we have identified all valid knowledge with the processes employed in the descriptive sciences. In that case the only knowledge available for the moral situation applies solely to its external features. Technical knowledge is not moral appreciation. That is of another order. When will we learn this elemental distinction? Our Hebrew-Jewish inheritance should help us, if we would permit it. At its best their knowledge was of the valuational kind. A knowledge of God, for instance, meant a value insight and a personal commitment. Instead, we take hold by another handle. Our theory of their revelation sends us in another direction—to treating lightly the obligation to become morally intelligent.

Plato, on the other hand, had taken a threefold precaution about the unity of the particular virtues. In the first place, the life of each virtue is the spirit of reason immanent within it. *Temperance* obtains its principle of *metron* or proportion from reason. Its healthy-mindedness witnesses to the supremacy of reason over appetite. Temperance is realized only when that supremacy and right to rule is acknowledged by appetite as the order of nature. *Courage*, likewise, draws its innermost spirit from the balanced perspective of reason. In that perspective lies the difference between foolhardiness and courage on one side, and between cowardice and courage on the other. The early Christians manifest

their superb courage as the endurance of hardship. Insight, perspective ruled over their instinctive emotional reaction. "These are they who have come up out of great tribulation," and so inherit an everlasting kingdom. *Wisdom* results from the proper functioning of reason over the whole nature of man. Involved in this functioning is a negative aspect of non-interference on the part of appetite and emotion. Their proper order resembles that of a traveler's dependence upon a guide. Only the guide knows.

Three main parts to the soul are correlated with four virtues. Here comes the second precaution. The three major virtues are themselves bound together by a keystone virtue called *justice*. It is a virtue which underscores the unity of all the others. Justice is the grand principle of harmony. It brings the peace of orderliness, symmetry, harmony, a rational unity throughout diversity. Attend a symphony concert and you will understand Plato's doctrine of the virtues. Enjoy the tuning-up process. Each instrument strums in competition with every other. But that does not compose a symphony. Music begins when each of these instruments finds its place within a harmonious whole. The same principle obtains in a flower garden. Taken separately there appears to be a riot of colors. Their blending makes the garden, and a garden of many flowers lends loveliness to the orchid.

In the third place, Plato held that unless the virtues grew from a common stem and were constituted in unity, they could not be known or taught. In that case, human life could not arrive. Goodness or righteousness appreciated and appropriated makes human life human. At least that is where God meets man with His best word. "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is in the person of Jesus, because all other mediation has proved itself inadequate. In the unique quality of the moral integrity of Jesus, God reveals His righteous love most completely.

In this most difficult and befuddled area in the Christian life Plato would make a good teacher. He would say clearly

what most Christians only vaguely surmise: Love is the tree whose branches are the particular virtues. Christians talk about love as a basal sentiment, a general attitude, but rarely take it for what it essentially means—an insight as delicate as it is profound. Love is not therefore a single virtue, but has a three-in-one nature: an insight, an attitude, and a sentiment. These are different functions of the one spirit. That order presents an ascending scale. It is so easy to begin with the sentiment, and to stop there, and then never come to realize that taken alone it is a counterfeit sentiment. A distinctively Christian life begins with a distinctive sense for the values called virtues. Not that insight, attitude, and sentiment are separate threads or successive blocks. We are concerned now with an order of logical primacy. The finest chapter on this problem that has come to my attention was written by G. F. Barbour, *A Philosophical Study of Christian Ethics*,²⁵ on the "Synthetic Character of Christian Virtues." With a fine appreciation for thinking on the virtues which has been done elsewhere, Barbour speaks of a Christian "transvaluation of values" where love tempers the harsher aspects of personality. Courage is matched with gentleness, earnestness with equanimity, severity with mercy, reverence with independence, humility with dignity, veracity with considerateness, reticence with outspoken courage. Since the virtues are eminently positive in character, "we are justified in defining Christian Ethics as essentially *synthetic*." This view, it seems to me, has the distinctive merit of recognizing a primacy of discernment in love together with a deep and living spirit of unity throughout all the virtues.

The all inclusive character of love is illustrated by the two best-known passages in the Scriptures. Saint Paul's ode to love becomes intelligible when two things are kept to the fore. First is the contrast between a believing faith and a practicing moral integrity; secondly, the overwhelming conviction that "*love never faileth*," making it the original

²⁵ London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1911.

spring of the Christian life. Our second example comes from that famous summary, the Sermon on the Mount. What barrels of nonsense have been written, for instance, on, "Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."²⁶ Again in these turbulent days all the way from literalists to the allegorizers of a thousand shades, protagonists are tearing words into shreds, when they might be thinking. The case is much the same wherever the discussion bears upon going the second mile, loving your enemy, giving alms, divorce, oath taking, and so on down the line. Evidently Jesus is trying to teach the meaning of his distinctive spirit of righteous love. He talks their language. He suggests analogies, not literal illustrations. For a morally good life cannot be lived by rote. He wants men to discover for themselves the inexhaustible spirit of a loving heart. Goodness requires a sensitive appreciation for all the values involved, and a personal integration of the highest values in any situation into a permanent moral selfhood. Jesus is here speaking a commentary on the history of morals throughout the world.

V. CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Plainly, no final list of Christian virtues can be given, any more than a final count can be made of the cells of a living body. Virtues, like the cells, are expressions of an organic life. They adapt, and defy, and initiate. Each one carries in itself something of all the others. They experience ill and death together. When we carelessly cull over the life of a rake, looking for some purple virtue of royalty, we are only explicating the last stages of a moral obtuseness. One slender thread alone redeems our futility: It is not quite possible to obliterate altogether from human nature the last vestige of decency. Likewise, when in our eyes Veterans of the Cross make one mistake on top of a perfect record, the mark is not on the veteran but on those who misconstrue the moral situa-

²⁶ Matt. V, 39.

tion. Among the virtues a mutual support and a common life stream gives stability and cumulative vitality. Christian virtues only go out in company with each other. The renegade virtues, which we call vices, must attack from within the ranks. There ensues a common deterioration or/and a common triumph.

One is completely at liberty to make his own list of Christian virtues, provided he is ready to keep revising the list at the behest of a deepening insight. The church Fathers added to the cardinal virtues of the Greeks, three of their own: Faith, hope and charity. Not much can be said for that. Virtues of a Christian character are not a collected heap that can be artificially arranged, but a living, balanced system that is unified and nourished in love. Consider the following tentative grouping of the virtues with two provisos. First, it will be well to stick closely to the outstanding qualities manifest in Jesus. Then, bear in mind that if you start with any virtue the lines of relationship lead to all the others, and without boundary markers.

One. Many pointers indicate that Jesus headed his list with *sincerity*. Sincerity means single-mindedness, the opposite of duplicity; transparent forthrightness, so that the penetrating light of the sun shows a uniform nature through and through. Men universally and spontaneously praise such openness of spirit, where act and agent, deed and personality, completely harmonize. Just so do we despise hypocrisy, a play-acting, pretense, an insidious make-believe. Great moralists glorify sincerity. In the untranslatable closing lines of the *Phaedrus* Socrates offers a supreme wish, an ideal Greek prayer: "Beloved Pan, and whatever gods inhabit this place, grant to me beauty in the inward soul; make the outward and the inward man fast friends. May I regard the wise as wealthy, and may my mead of gold be such as none but a temperate man can carry and own." Buried at the heart of the Ten Commandments is one that needs refurbishing: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Because, if you do, you conceal what constitutes his most precious treasure—the degree of moral integrity that means his very self. Jesus ranks himself with the greatest moralists by his constant warnings against duplicity in others and self-deception. “A good tree bringeth forth good fruit.”²⁷ Therefore, plant the right kind of a tree. Or, changing the figure, he queries: “If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is the darkness?”²⁸ In his own right he lived among men with a dependability that suggests the majesty of the movements of the stars. You know where to find him, and you can trust him. He is just what he claims to be, all and out.

Two. In proportion to a man's sincerity he develops *moral discernment*. These grow especially close together. You cannot locate one ahead of the other. From one angle, sincerity looks like the one indispensable condition of moral insight, and that undoubtedly is the case. Therein lies the value of what we often call goodheartedness. But from the reverse direction, moral discernment appears to be both condition and result of sincerity. It is surprising how many stories and parables on alertness about values the Gospels attribute to Jesus.²⁹ If human history teaches anything, it says that “narrow is the gate and straitened the way, that leads unto life.” Men do not drift or stumble into fullness of life. The journey is upgrade all the way. An old Greek proverb had it *chalepa ta kala*, difficult is the good. Indeed, it is, and the difficult part of it is the costly payment of continuous self-transformation. Moral regeneration is the only coin in that realm. Goodness is not on the world market. Neither is it perfect obedience to absolute law. It can therefore neither be purchased, nor transferred. Ideal goodness grows in a fully alert mind that is previously committed to following through on moral vision, at the cost of a completely trans-

²⁷ Matt. VII, 15-29.

²⁸ Matt. VI, 23; Luke XI, 35.

²⁹ Luke VI, 20, 32-36; XII, 35-36, 48; XIX, 12 ff.; Matt. V, 3; VII, 7-8; XXV, 1-13, *et passim*.

formed self. It stems from the discriminating response of an enlightened love. This is where love comes nearest to being a particular virtue. A trifling line among us says that love is blind. Well, silly sentiment is blind, but it is not love. What appears to be the severity of love is a combination of discriminating insight and courage. Plato tended to merge love with the highest kind of value-discernment, with wisdom and justice combined. Love seeks perfection in its beloved, and is therefore ready to undergo the down payment of self-sacrifice.

But the finest fruit, an educated discernment at the end of the highest branch, is respect for an ideal of moral personality. Kant taught us to say, "Act so as to respect humanity, whether in thine own self or in that of another, always as an end in itself, and never as a means." He learned that from the ethical teaching of the Gospels. It phrases the principle of the infinite worth of personality. He accented two places. Humanity in thyself or in any other. Mine and yours has been obliterated. The *quality* of value counts above all else. Secondly, it is an *ideal* of personality. Not you and me, just as we are and have been. Jesus believed in the future of people. He told stories, many of them, saying that God trusted persons who had shown themselves unworthy of trust. Zaccheus, the prodigal son, the rich young ruler, the man who was all-sufficient and built larger barns, were among them. The reason is that in the conditioned human future, God maps out a new strategy in loving approach, and a man can never quite hide the last talent his diviner human nature put into his hands.³⁰ The sower went forth to sow, and, having enough seed, he kept at sowing. Only a profound depth of loving insight could see that.³¹ In its highest grade of potentiality the human soul is of incomparable worth. In the last analysis, that ideal of good char-

³⁰ Matt. XXV, 14 ff.; Luke XIX, 12 ff.

³¹ Matt. XIII; Mark IV; Luke VIII.

acter is the value by which all other goods become worthwhile. Hence respect is the only sane response that can be made to it.

Three. The germ of all other virtues are in the first two. Our only task is to make them stand out. A third virtue is *humility*. Scoffers have always had a good time with this Christian accent. The meek and humble souls do not rule the earth. They suffer terribly. But Jesus saw that the great issue concerns a ruling of the self, not of the earth. The tyrant, as Plato long ago reminded us, is to be pitied and not envied. He is a slave in a world of slaves; hated by all men, the servant of his own whims, he resembles a paralytic who must spend his days fighting other men. He rules neither the world nor himself.³² Plato makes Socrates in the *Gorgias* keep saying, it is better to suffer injustice than to do it, for, when you stoop to injustice and invest your willing in evil, you become an evil and sick soul. So many people can't see this. They are in the ridiculous position of the Athenian public who killed Socrates, because as their physician he did not prescribe a candy diet. A wise man wants not length of days, but quality of life.

A first condition for achieving that quality is to cultivate the ability to come to terms with yourself. Jesus saw this because the cult of the Law about him so frequently lost themselves in conceit. Self-deceived, they lost perspective for others as well as for themselves. Self-righteous pride and arrogance inflated their empty souls. Hence also their scorn and contempt for others. Only humility keeps from a man a kind of fatal blindness. Obscuring both the actual self and the ideal, self-conceit culminates in a blasphemous self-sufficiency. The humble shall be exalted.³³

Four. In a busy or harsh world men need a constant reminder that *sympathy* is a very essential kind of moral understanding. In fact sympathy is a counterpart of humility. A person who insists upon a modest estimate of himself by

³² *Gorgias* 510b f.; *Republic* IX, 579c.

³³ Luke XIV, 8 ff. Cf. XVII, 10.

himself, and so is genuinely humble already knows the necessity of *syn* and *patheo*, of feeling together with the situation of other men. Jesus was appreciated for his fine compassion. But with sympathy there goes gentleness, forgiveness, and cheerfulness. One day the disciples were irked by the gentleness of Jesus. He told them a story about two debtors, and forgiveness, and the loyalty of love.³⁴ An awareness of one's own limitations and the difficulties that others face produces a willingness to forgive. Forgiveness is what all men need, what most men crave, what few men have the courage to ask for or to grant without reservation. How often shall I forgive? A wise and good man said, "Until seventy times seven," or, in other words, lose count and think solely of the well being of the man.³⁵

Forgiveness, however, is a costly affair. Our simple minds oversimplify the spiritual processes by which life comes. False analogies serve us ill at this point. It's an easy matter to tear up a widow's note, or clear the ledger for a new start. That falsification reaches its peak in theological theories of the atonement. By the time these theories are transposed into songs, the ideas approach blasphemy. They caricature the God of Jesus and belie the moral process. Really we should be concerned with our side of this affair. God's forgiveness will take care of His. His good will is unfailing. That is just where we need sober thinking. His forgiveness is bound by all the conditions of moral regeneration for the one forgiven. Forgiveness cannot be thrust upon an unwilling spirit. Therefore forgiveness costs a self-sacrificing love the ingenuity and devotion which induces repentance; and it costs the forgiven all the loss in repudiating his past, making restitution wherever possible, and a recommitment to other and higher moral ideals. Luther was on the trail of a profound idea when he placed forgiveness ahead of repentance. Forgiveness bears the initial cost of inducing repent-

³⁴ Luke VII, 41 ff.

³⁵ Matt. XVIII, 22.

ance, and then adds the price of helping to reconstruct the life of the forgiven. That cost is all paid in the coin of the moral realm. All legalistic hocus-pocus belongs in the limbo of superstition, along with cannibalism and human sacrifice.

Five. Given our primeval human beginnings alongside the ideal of Christian character, and one virtue stands out as the redoubtable ally of all the rest, *courage*. Courage has always ranked high among the qualities of an admirable character. First in time came the courage of the soldier, but that has long been superseded by the courage marked by poise and confidence under misrepresentation in every day situations. Any reader of the *Apology* or the *Phaedo* cannot escape the quiet imperturbability of Socrates before the judges and his false accusers. It brings to mind another extraordinary citizen who faced the calumny of influential religious leaders, the uncanny deceit of puppet rulers, and the boorishness of the rabble. "Go and tell the fox," he once said, "that I will be here doing my work." And when Pilate began to ask questions about the irrelevant prejudices of his accusers, he put the whole company on the defensive. He had a spiritual ancestry like that, prophetic souls with sincerity, moral discernment, humility, sympathy and courage. Who can match the courage of the suffering servant of Isaiah fifty-three? Similarity has made the connection in the mind of many Christians.

Courage of the latter variety has long been redeeming human kind. Rare personalities who face in this direction are known to all of us. Christians, all of them, under whatever name. They celebrate him who announced the blessedness of the peacemakers, the persecuted, the reviled, the maligned.³⁶ Some early disciples were recognized by their *boldness*.³⁷ The fruits of this brand of courage are manifold. Here comes patience, persistence, confidence, fidelity, constancy, fortitude, severity, dependability, cheerfulness. To

³⁶ Matt. V, 9-12.

³⁷ Acts IV, 13.

people who lived in a very hard world, through one of its darker hours, a writer of the *Hebrews* heartened his companions by reminding them to "consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners."³⁸ And when events had turned very much for the worse, the elusive language of a late writer climaxes his appeal by pointing to the courage of Jesus, and to the saints standing before the throne of God.³⁹ Under severe trials, the truth will sometimes show that cowardice can be the worst form of cruelty.

VI. SELF-SACRIFICE AND SELF-FULFILLMENT

We have been watching the moral discernment of righteous love finding its way to the highest qualities. These virtues are what enable a person to live abundantly. And if abundantly, some things are left aside; not as worthless, but simply because the best does not include everything. Our name for the exclusiveness involved in selection of the best is renunciation, self-sacrifice. Morbid people try to make a virtue of it, an intrinsic value out of an instrumental value. Sometimes they retire behind gray stone walls and shut out the "world," in order the better to cultivate goodness. But if you must go wrong, you will be less ridiculous in their company than with the morally illiterate who spend time trying to prove that Jesus was not an ascetic.

In fact we have a very faulty notion of asceticism. Etymologically it refers to the training of an athlete, a scholar, an artist. Discipline for the sake of the best, that is what asceticism means. Jesus was never on firmer ground than when he insisted upon the costliness of discipleship, without any hope of reward in the ordinary sense.⁴⁰ Undiscerning traditionalists put promises of reward on his lips. They are those who live on the half-baked notion that so much goodness guarantees that much prosperity, and who neither read *Job*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 3.

³⁹ Rev. V, 12 ff.

⁴⁰ Luke IX, 51 ff., *et passim*.

intelligently nor hear Jesus accurately. If admonitions serve any good purpose, they should be used to clarify the truth that *many good things can be made the enemy of the best*. Discipline, training, *ascesis*, convey rich ideas. Never mind the fact that good instruments are often misused. They remain good instruments, in the service of goodness.

Self-sacrifice forms part of our common experience. We cannot avoid it if we would. We should not if we could. We ought to understand it better, if possible.⁴¹ Consider in the first place certain historic objections to self-sacrifice. *First*, self-sacrifice is psychologically out of the question. At the root of every action lives the desire to enhance one's self. This objection rests on the myth about original selfishness. Its farcical argument confuses relation to a self with an exclusive interest by that self. *Second*, self-sacrifice is a sad necessity of living together. No one willingly would submit to it. We accept it solely because we must. Here an important fact is acknowledged, and then painted in somber colors. It lacks the perspective for seeing that scale is an integral part of value. *Third*, self-sacrifice is needless, because we realize our real selves by participating more fully in a common good. The child gains by becoming an agreeable member of his family; a business man prospers by building up good will in the community, and so on. This objection tries to decorate a cross with roses. It misses the essential point that the self-sacrificed and the self-realized are two different selves. *Finally*, self-sacrifice is a glorious madness. It involves a kind of reckless abandon in giving oneself. Such self-giving defies reason and is the more commendable on that account. A martyr does not deliberate, else he would be lost. Here again, a nascent truth that is struggling to be born gets a blow on the head. Self-sacrifice is glorious, but it is not an irrational mystery, a silly paradox. In self-sacrifice a cheap rationality is left behind as the vestigial remains of a lesser life.

⁴¹ See the excellent Chapter 6 in *The Nature of Goodness*, by George Herbert Palmer.

Self-sacrifice gets pointed up in our thinking by a twofold demand. Physical nature confronts us with a price to pay. We can obtain a healthy body, under certain unalterable conditions that we both give up and become devoted. Otherwise, disease will run its train of suffering across our domain. The second set of demands for sacrifice comes from other persons. It begins in the family circle and gradually widens in principle to include all people. Social demand has a million tongues. It ranges all the way from the road hog to the Macedonian call. Sometimes self-sacrifice, therefore, at various levels exacts the price of a frightful loneliness. The paramount question, therefore, centers upon the rationality of the demands made upon us.

Nothing could be more plain than the senseless irrationality of most of the demands made upon us, not from nature, but by other persons. On the basis of sheer numbers the general attitude of protest against the doctrine is well founded. For, taken at face value, the larger proportion of social demands for sacrifice are both senseless and immoral. Senseless and immoral they are because they request the sacrifice of the higher self for the sake of lesser values. Our question then resolves itself into, *what self is to be sacrificed?* In section two we saw that a convenient method distinguishes four levels of the self. (1) In the beginning comes the elemental biotic self of desire-satisfaction. (2) More quickly than the word can be said the social self emerges. (3) Then ideas are born of a self that shares in common with other persons. (4) Finally, the concept develops of a self in which the universal quality of reality becomes concrete. Mr. Carl Sandburg's alleged remark about a whole zoo of selves oversimplifies the situation. All of these levels of potential selves, each of which shades into various gradations, live in us at the same time.

Which self is to be sacrificed? The answer appears to be that all of the selves are to be contributory to the highest self. Consider what this involves. The biotic desire-satisfaction self

has innumerable connections with economic goods. These objects form an indispensable part of the total self. Sacrifice means unequivocally that they must not be allowed to usurp the place of the higher values and seek to control the whole self. When objects of desire-satisfaction operate in the role of a contributing factor to the higher ranges, sacrifice means sublimation of lower values into the higher. The point deserves stress. The foolish habit of depreciating things arises in a distorted outlook. It reflects a terrific struggle toward sanity. But actually things obtain genuine value only when they discover their contributing role. Things acquire their worth by serving as instruments of the good life for persons, and their value is increasingly enhanced in that capacity. That is what Christian stewardship means to say. It goes without emphasis that to accomplish the feat of enthroning such rationality at the biotic level of human life is an enormously unfinished task. The same principle holds with respect to the other two levels, for the social and the common selves. On both of these levels the irrationality of primeval impulse joins with the cunning of intelligence. What crimes are devised, if not committed, today by an appeal to self-sacrifice as a moral ideal! Live for others! Sacrifice yourself for others! In service for the general welfare! These are the consecrated untouchables that shun the light of good sense. Self-sacrifice is morally justified only when the object of it is a more universal value and therefore higher.

On this point, I hold certain truths to be axiomatic and inviolable. It is always morally wrong to sacrifice a higher self on behalf of a lower. Whether that higher self lives in you or in me makes a purely incidental difference. Self-sacrifice constitutes the first law of the moral life. Its requirements embody the highest reach of rationality. Instead of a glorious madness, self-sacrifice engages our best discernment, our finest sanity. When self-sacrifice reaches its finest flower it becomes the way of self-fulfillment, the realization of that highest universal self which combines into one the human

good, social well-being, common welfare, and the divinely incarnate self. What Jesus said about losing life, in order to save it is paradox only for darkened minds. The critical phrase, "for my sake and the gospel's," is too often overlooked.⁴² Therein lies embedded the divine ideal of selfhood, in relation to which self-sacrifice becomes contributory, necessary, rational, alluring.

⁴² Matt. XVI, 25; Mark VIII, 35; Luke IX, 24.

Development of a Christian Ethics

IN VIEW of the conditions under which the Scriptures were written, the Bible presents a panoramic view of the growth of moral ideals during many centuries. At one temporal extreme are found the crude barbaric customs of a primitive race battling for a foothold in a small occupied strip of land on the eastern border of the Mediterranean. At the other end we are introduced to the processes in which first- and second-century Christian communities were working out higher levels of conduct. In between are the plateaus of the Deuteronomic Codes, valleys of the priestly sections, and the prophetic mountain country. Two outstanding ranges of the latter area are named after the creative spirits, Paul and Jesus.

I. OUR BIBLE LEGACY

Our problem reaches an acute stage only by reason of the manner in which the Scriptures have been misused. Speaking now of the Protestant branch of the Christian church, we can see how that abuse arises. We inherited first a particular theory of religious authority. Debatable issues could no longer be settled by appeal to the authority of the church. But some standard of authority appears too many as a practical necessity. Naturally the Scriptures came rapidly to perform that function. As the issues were raised gradually into a clearer light, specific theories grew up about the authority of the Bible. This is not the place to review them. Our concern lies with the main fact that the Bible as a religious authority assumes with many the role also of a final court of appeal in morals. One unusually careful writer gets all tangled up in this problem. He tries to start out with Jesus as a new moral revelation and ends up with the common dogma, to wit: "The Bible as a whole, and in its final ethical-religious

development of truth, is to be regarded by Protestantism as the authoritative outward rule of faith and practice.”¹ Almost without exception the literature of various Protestant groups is written from the premise that the Bible constitutes “the rule of faith and practice.” Revised editions of books on doctrine and discipline, and general council meetings are moved to reaffirm that major premise.

Most instructive is the way in which this conclusion has been worked out. Five steps stand out. To begin with, the conclusion began in the original premise about the nature of religious authority. Religious truth is mediated through the facets of human experience. But human experience resembles a changing stream, with many eddies and fresh springing tributaries. Inevitably the question assaults the mind: How are contradictions to be dissolved? Who is to decide the merits of two incompatible views? Where should a Christian go for reliable guidance? Protestant theory has answered: The Scriptures provide us with a rule of faith and practice, where faith means religious belief and practice means morals.

A second step is taken as numerous theories of Scriptural authority develop. At one end of the line stands the theory of verbal inspiration. Applied to ethical standards this theory becomes especially devastating both for religion and for morals. The will of God is blandly identified with the moral valuations of moral children. Such a God dethrones Himself in the respect of ordinary people. Then, too, God is made to contradict himself. After an obviously arbitrary display of power, God repents and reverses Himself. When Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount presents the will of God as very different, and in open contradiction to the lesser gods of the Scriptural accounts, the literalist gets hopelessly lost. Consequently, many qualified versions of Scriptural authority have emerged in application. Theoretically, these have been diminishing in number. Yet in the view of many liberal-

¹ Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics*, p. 63.

minded Christians the future of Christianity depends upon a revival of Bible authority.

A third step deserves very special attention, because it contemplates a *deduction* of ethical teachings from religious premises. The Bible is a religious book. Its themes are religious through and through. Other materials are introduced as accessories to religion. Therefore, get your religious bases established and your morals follow. A Bible-grounded faith is necessary to undergird the moral life. The motivation for the life of Jesus, for example, was religious. Only the love of God in Christ Jesus constrained the Apostle Paul to do and to endure. History shows a one-way dependence of morality upon religion. Christian ethics rests back upon a theological foundation; it is Christian theology in action. "The slow decay of the Christian faith and worship proves to have undermined the moral structure. And we cannot reconstruct Christian Ethics save on the basis of Christian faith."² The general position is chock-full of fallacies; culminating in the assumptions that morality finds its basis only in religious faith, and that for Christians this means a faith generated principally from the Bible.

The latter part of the statement just made constitutes a separate fourth step. Usually in Protestant circles that step is taken for granted as self-evident. The Bible comprises the fountainhead of both faith and morals. Where else could a Christian faith derive its basic principles, except in the Bible? If that source were restricted to the prophetic sections, and above all to the Gospels, it would rest upon much firmer ground. But that is a distinction few take the trouble to draw. I am constantly surprised at some who profess otherwise. For them a faith not settled once for all in a book revelation lacks the advantage of simplicity and finality. On that basis Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jesus and Paul were terribly handicapped. If so, there are many persons who have reason to be thankful for that. A book revelation might have

² F. R. Barry, *Christianity in the Modern World*, p. 7.

spoiled much of the greatest theological and moral legacy of all time. But the idea has been insinuated into the very marrow of our souls. It is actually possible for a writer who founds Christian ethics upon "the belief in a living God, from Whom springs the moral order of humanity"³ to revert to a position where he finds "the eternal principles underlying human conduct as these are set forth in the Bible." The two positions are by no means on a par, and there is no good ground for trying to merge them into one outlook.

Finally, and subsequently, we have on our hands a serious confusion of morality with morals. Morals, we have pointed out before, are made up of the changing apprehension of moral principles by various peoples in various ages. The Bible presents a vast array of such a changing stream of approved moral ideals. That is why it supplies valuable source materials in a study of morality. But morality includes these changing standards, and much more. Morality makes a critical survey of approved moral ideals with the purpose of sifting and supplementing them. Morality undertakes to explore the wider and deeper implications of approved standards, and to construct a valid picture of the whole moral situation. So it turns out that wherever Biblical materials on the moral life are accepted without examination as valid moral principles, a double offense has been committed. The Bible has been misused, and morality distorted. Such distortion makes up one of the commonest misapprehensions of our day. It is precisely the same conclusion at which a reductionistic naturalism arrives. Murky thinking on great problems makes strange bedfellows. That discovery is enough to give both the bibliolater and the naturalist heart trouble.

II. WANTED—A SYSTEMATIC CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Enough has been said to drive home the distinction between the teachings of the Bible and many theories which involve misapplication of the Book. By making use of that distinction

³ A. R. Osborn, *Christian Ethics*, p. 223. Compare p. 11, *et al.*

we come upon an observation of considerable import. Taking the Bible for what it is—a source book on the morals of the Hebrew-Jewish people during approximately a thousand years—one of its meanings for a Christian ethics becomes sun-clear. In the nature of the case, there is little Biblical foundation for a systematic account of the moral life.

To some Christians the mere announcement will occasion surprise. Yet I think the announcement should be repeated, if necessary, in order to bring our awareness to the point of acknowledging facts. Nothing can be gained from evading a critical estimate of our situation. I am inclined to think that self-deception is always a serious matter. Distortion in perspective operates against a discovery of larger truths. Our thinking on the moral life cannot be allowed to rest with vague surmise or unquestioned assumption. If the Bible does not present an orderly account of ethical principles or press the quest for valid norms of conduct, perhaps all is not lost.

For, obviously, the Scriptural materials on morals, what standards have been approved, are still available. And morals, we have been repeatedly reminded, constitute the point of departure for any ethical study. The unsystematic character and the diversity of range among Biblical standards are in themselves a revealing fact. When we move from the moral barbarisms of earlier historical sections—like Joshua and Judges, for instance—toward the marvelous insights of the great eighth-century prophets, we can appreciate how moral progress is won. The costliness of it appalls us. But there are also innumerable suggestions on the question of better methods of advance, and on principles that have a permanent work to do. That is the truth back of talk about “permanent underlying principles” of the Bible. More than that, if the Bible lacks systematic presentation of its moral principles, the door is wide open for utilizing its materials in such an indispensable study. The importance of going on with a study of ethics that shall be Christian in the sense of being a valid interpretation for conduct is doubtless the supreme need for

our distraught world. Dangerous as it is to select one need as supreme, where so many great demands claim consideration, I will hazard one more for that exaggerated list.

Many reasons clamor for mention in support of such a claim. I mention only two, leaving the reader to supply the remainder. These reasons stand closely associated. They deal with the history of Christianity and with its inner logic. *First*, historic Christianity has stood among the living religions of the world making a notable effort to match the moral needs of men with help for beleaguered souls. Regardless of explicit theories of Christians, their faith has meant to help heal the moral hurt of men everywhere. In times of exhilaration Christians have claimed that Christianity has the answer to moral failure and to achievement. Obviously the claim has not been verified to any appreciable degree, considering the goal Christians propose rather than the moral distance we have come. That is where the *second* reason enters. The innermost logic of Christianity accepts the togetherness of faith in God and the good life with men. If we do not go forward at a much more accelerated rate, the logic of Christianity will be rendered increasingly infertile in our generation. Christianity cannot light the procession from the rear. It begins to look as if civilization were a race between a better morality to co-ordinate our energies and periodic suicide and murder waves among the best brains and blood of the race. If the light that is in us be moral darkness we give evidence of disloyalty to the deepest within Christianity, and bring its day of usefulness toward a close.

But what if Christians neglect to enter the open door of an opportunity for constructing a Christian ethics? That is a question I cannot now attempt to answer. I do not think anything like an adequate answer can be given. Perhaps only a Plato, or a Dante, or a Milton could do it justice. Personally, I doubt it, in the face of the tremendous power for good or ill now resting in human hands. Therefore, and in the second place, I pass on to a very good reason why no Biblical basis

for a systematic Christian ethics can be found. The distinctive excellence of the Bible has involved specialization. Specialization entails a loss in other directions. This is not to assess praise or blame. I am trying to describe a situation. The religious interests of the Scriptures are central and practically all-absorbing. What attention was directly and consciously given to the moral life by these writers arose as a religious demand. Under the circumstances this appears to be a perfectly natural consequence. We simply cannot expect to find everything in the Bible, our theories of it notwithstanding. It seems to me much more to the point to appreciate what it brings us. Instead of imposing on the Book exaggerated claims, it is time to take it for what it contributes. If the Bible is not a treatise on ethics, let us not claim that it is. After all the Orient has done little in that direction. That is not its way, and the Bible came out of the East. In the West the first systematic ethics came from Aristotle who died in 322 B.C. Yet his predecessors Socrates and Plato made everlasting contributions to ethical thought. Similarly the Bible makes its notable contributions. It makes a beginning. That beginning imposes upon us an obligation. In that direction our energies ought to be spent. The Bible is a religious book *with a moral accent*. For that reason the world is indebted to the Hebrew-Jewish-Christian Scriptures.

Such an interpretation of religion and morality enriches both of them. With the establishment of a home in Palestine the crude nature cults of the Hebrews were gradually moralized into a *covenant* religion. When religious worship showed a tendency to separate itself from moral requirements for daily living, the prophet thundered his denunciation and called the people up to the fundamental concerns of justice and mercy. These are "the things ye ought to have done, and not left the other undone." The tendency has universal rootage. To do justice and to love mercy in concrete human relationship is much more difficult than to intone liturgy and read prayers prepared by others. More difficult is the moral

road because it requires self-transformation. One kind of religion changes you, while the other kind rearranges the furniture in your house. In the pages of the Bible this deep-lying nascent moral spirit struggles to be born. And religion becomes correspondingly enriched with each prophetic success. But the prophet is always a minority with God, during his day.

Seven of the Ten Commandments promote a concern with basic human rights. Their order of arrangement reveals how stubborn and belated organized religion can be in resisting the moral element. No rhyme or reason can be found in their line of succession. See if you can rearrange them in some order of ascendancy which brings out their relative significance. Beginning with the fourth, they follow: Sabbath observance, honor for parents, killing, adultery, property rights, slander, coveting. Their order reflects very definitely the historical context in which they grew up. Taking the codal fragments of the Old Testament as a whole, they come out remarkably well. Three fundamental groups of rights are acknowledged in principle among their own people, even though too little observed within even that circle.⁴ The first group makes history. Nearly all of them concern provisions for the bare means of subsistence. Their horizon hangs close to keeping the body alive. That makes a revealing comment upon their tragic situation, and reflects all the more credit to their moral-spiritual development. Usually laws deal with minimum requirements for subsistence. Why should these be an exception? Man has a body, with minimum needs. Hence, their laws about gleaning, hospitality, prompt payment of wage. These provisions extended also to clothing, shelter, ownership of land, and the right to labor.

Back of what appears to be a fanatical absorption with Sabbath regulations, a second group of rights begins to emerge. Humanitarian considerations shade upward toward a dim recognition that man is more than an animal. Man is a spirit.

⁴ Read Exod. XXII, 26f.; Deut. XXIV, 12-13; Amos IV-V.

Above the line of bare subsistence he begins to live more abundantly. Abundance here signifies quality. Beyond making a living, a man wants to create a life. The Greek made this second demand for leisure basic. Their word *Skolē* translates into school, an opportunity to cultivate the mind. Aristotle constructed his doctrine of instruments, specifying leisure and opportunity for cultivating the reflective, aesthetic and cultural interests. "We work," he said, "in order that we may have leisure."

A third group of rights centered upon liberty. Laws cannot do much here in a direct and positive way. Every prophet's soul is alive with the pulsating rhythm of the spirit of liberty. From this level we must walk beyond the Old Testament into the New. Thousands of years of heroic living breathe through that selection by Jesus of a passage from Isaiah:⁵

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised.

The spirit of liberty is indeed the spirit of the Lord. Hence the early Christians made much of it. The fact that they were politically a subject people accounts only for the lesser part of that emphasis.

III. AN ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

A whole nest of questions stride out to meet us. Why, with this background, has Christianity neglected to take the clew of a moralized religion? With these matchless beginnings, why do we continue to fail in bringing this moral concern to its higher development by a systematic study of Christian ethics? Why don't we follow through with the indispensable task? Why does the scourge of moral illiteracy continue to plague us? Why do we Christians not understand better the

⁵ Luke IV, 16-20.

moral flavor of the Book we claim as our guide? Why does religious instruction profess to aim at Christian character as a goal, and then leave to assumption and surmise the one indispensable condition for achieving that goal?

Why have even our seminaries been so disgracefully slow in recognizing the study of ethics in the curriculum? Examine the bulletins even in 1940 and see the grudging place yielded to the subject. Examine more closely the type of courses listed. Two predominate in the field. In the lead are courses with a deductive standpoint. The foundational principles are embedded in Biblical and theological sources. Accordingly, our need is for faultless deduction and a "clear affirmation" of Christian principles. The second type of ethics offered in theological education specializes on two points. First, moral principles are empirically grounded, and derive solely from the social sciences. This means that moral concepts are reduced to non-moral, i.e., psychological, sociological, economic, and political terms. Morality gets constricted to morals or *mores*. Translated into terms of Christian faith, this is a living form of atheism. Moral distinctions have lost their irreducible meaning.⁶ Righteousness indicates useful inter-human agreements which for various reasons have been approved. The righteousness of God denotes a compliment which a people have paid Him. But God knows nothing about that, if there is a God. A second focal point of concern in this second type revolves about practical applications. It is the gospel of "do something." When a strike breaks out Christians should mediate between the opposing parties. The time has come for *action*. What we need is more action. Invent therefore new techniques and initiate experiments in application. What is to be applied? Come to think of it, what indeed?

In these regions we are trenching upon solid truths which live next door to the foolishness involved. By all means make use of Biblical materials, but use them as raw materials to be

⁶ Precisely the logic of totalitarianism.

critically examined, not as literal commandments of God to be accepted willy-nilly. Let light shine in from all the social sciences, and from every other fragment of any science. But again, let us learn how to use the sciences. Their development has become one of the great potentialities of the modern era. Yet it is distressingly clear that our ability to use them appropriately lags far behind. Theoretically we have gone beyond the bounds of reason in misusing them to construct naturalistic philosophies. Practically, their tremendous power remains in the service of economic privilege and political irresponsibility. How long, generations of men, how long?

With all the accumulated advantages of the centuries, it is fairly clear that no clear-headed and cogent Christian ethics is available. On our horizon are very few signs that adequate preparation for developing one is in the offing. On the contrary, our more recent religious heritage leans heavily against the possibility of a fresh beginning. The future at this point appears to be mortgaged to the past. Not alone in practice does Christian ethics play a relatively incidental role. Our culture draws its main sources elsewhere, until the earthly lot of millions is being settled by other and sometimes hostile forces. In general theory Christian ethics makes history by being omitted from the picture. Histories of ethics disclose a monotonous lack of interest in the offerings of Christian ethics toward the moral situation. Chapters on Christian ethics are conspicuously wanting. Can this situation be explained on the grounds of prejudice, lack of information, special consideration, or what? What of it? Who among us dares to raise that question? Surely the answer is plain: everything of primary importance in human life is implicated in it. Otherwise, Christianity becomes irrelevant. A Christianity that soft pedals its moral element has already turned traitor to its founders. Such a crumb-gathering ethical outlook as we have must continue to fail in answering the cry for light in our distraught world, or to counteract the gathering darkness that hangs over our civilization. Who can say, "What of it?"

Again, I ask, why this arrested development in a Christian ethics?

IV. SIX HISTORIC APPROACHES

Perhaps some light may fall on these questions, if we look briefly at the materials commonly utilized in the making of a Christian ethics. On our way time must be taken out for clarifying one step. What is meant by "Christian" in this context? At the start Christian denotes a *descriptive* term. A Christian principle is one approved by members of a particular religious tradition. But taken in this descriptive sense Christian signifies a vast incongruous mass of opinions with wide approval. Present-day Christians who maintain that "the first charge upon industry is a reasonable return on invested capital" are obviously contradicting the principle of Jesus about the supreme worth of human personality. Christians who contend for the right to enslave through exploitation of human weaknesses in the form of elemental passions, through working conditions, through sharp bargaining in economic goods or in ideas, contradict the same principles and themselves. They would not willingly be thus enslaved. Such considerations send us back to the word Christian with a more basic question. Does Christian presume to carry also the meaning of true, valid, having rightful authority? The answer is, yes. Christianity more definitely leans toward its *normative* meaning. The clear distinction between the descriptive and the normative connotation of Christian forms the very heart of Christian ethics. Christian ethics simply cannot endure the continued confusion of these two meanings. The first meaning is a label affixed by historical circumstances; the second seeks to set out a universally valid ideal. The former simply designates a local color, while the latter specializes in critical examination with a view toward finding the highest principles, those approximating the will of God.

Suppose that we agree in holding the descriptive and the normative meanings together and in their distinctive char-

acters. Then, where shall we find the materials for a Christian ethics? Six historic answers have been given. One has already been cited. Protestants widely agree to the answer that revelation brings the principles of a Christian ethics. Some would say "*the Christian ethic.*" Of course, if you have on hand a complete revelation of God's will, that would settle the matter. And so Christians hurry off to discover *that* revelation in the Bible, the word of God. More cautious and leisurely souls take a developmental view of Biblical authority and select their valid principles. Some of their cousins are willing to locate these valid principles somewhere in the underlying foundations out of which the Scriptural formulations arise. More generous still are those who are ready to supplement Scriptural ethical principles with scientific studies.⁷ These various steps shift the issue in the direction of our contention: the Bible constitutes a source book on the moral life, and it is not intended as a text of authoritative moral codes. The real question is not *whether* the Bible shall be used, but *what manner* of use shall be made of it? At least one categorical answer can be made. The Bible is *one* of the sources. It is neither the sole source, nor one to be used in an authoritarian manner.

A second answer has been hinted at in one of the many versions of our Biblical material. It consists in a vague generalization to the effect that a definite moral element has pervaded the Christian movement throughout its history. This moral tradition runs like a golden cable adown the centuries. As we have had occasion to remark several times, Christianity is rooted in a great moral tradition of the Hebrew-Jewish prophets. Jesus distinguished himself by a moral integrity that led men to say, "God is like him." With that background, it is a reasonable expectation that Christians should have taken that torch and carried it through as the arc light of a Christian faith. But has that been done? It should have been. It might have been. Indeed it was done,

⁷ See Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 11, *et al.*

where the wish becomes father to the thought, and a dream is taken for actuality. A very common attitude is content to assume that a definitive Christian ethics is readily accessible, although a careful student of history would encounter considerable difficulty in locating it.

The unchanging element in our religion has been its ethical teaching. Its doctrines have been differently understood in each generation; its institutions and ritual have assumed many forms and have given rise to countless divisions. But the ethical demands have never varied. They were set forth two thousand years ago, and in the interval the whole framework of man's life has been remodeled; but they are still valid, in practically their whole extent, for all sections of the church.⁸

Failing the location of a definitive Christian ethics as the permanent core of Christian history, a third road opens up. A supposed moral substance of the Christian tradition broadens until it becomes practically synonymous with the *mores* or morals approved by the Christian church. A typical solution then reads as follows: "Christian ethics is a body of teaching concerning the good life derived from the revelation of God given in Christ and his church."⁹ Consider its meaning. A revelation of moral principles? Yes, provided revelation involves discovery in and through human experience. But note that the older one-way revelationism has evaporated from this conception. Revealed in Christ? Which one of the myriad theological constructions of Jesus? What branch of his church? In what period of its development? On examination the statement bristles with evasiveness. Very crucial considerations are settled by assumption. It is one thing to enumerate a series of actual historical standards that have been approved, and another matter to set forth valid principles. The Fathers worked out a new legalism, in which the divinely established moral law was revealed to men through very faulty traditions. The Schoolmen injected reason and

⁸ E. F. Scott, *Ethical Teaching of Jesus*, IX.

⁹ V. A. Dement, *God, Man and Society*, p. 35.

moral freedom into their Augustinian legacy, and combined that with a generous dose of Aristotle. During the modern period our so-called Christian ethics has assimilated from many living tendencies within its cultural surroundings. During much of that time ethical thinking has been in complete captivity to a contemporaneous theological framework. Hence this appeal to the ethics of the church claims distinction chiefly on the basis of its pontifical support of a *consensus gentium*. Christian ethics remains within that outlook as forthright and definite as a fog bank.

A fourth alternative has tried to select the judgment of the church through specific leaders. The principal honor goes to the ethical teachings of Jesus. Even that answer is not simple. How obtain the record of those teachings? The answer appears in the usual shift in the title of books in the field. As revised it reads, "The Ethical Teachings of the Gospels." Ordinarily next in line should come Paul the Apostle. A study of Pauline ethics uncovers two very different strains. One speaks for Paul the mystic-theologian, who deduces some startling ethical doctrine from the mystical-union-with-Christ theology. The other level of moral reflection comes from Paul the missionary-minister of the churches. Here the dominant strain is love, with minor speculations that amount to little more than a reissue of commonplace respectable conventions. As the stream of history broadens, the normative aspect of Christian ethics recedes. Leaders multiply. For example, "It is plain from what has been said that by the ethics of Christianity, understood as I understand them, I mean the Ethics of the New Testament, and especially of the Gospels. . . . The policy of the church must be justified or condemned by reference to the moral teachings of Christ, St. Paul, and St. John."¹⁰ Clearly the problem is not recognized. I forbear to mention St. Thomas, Luther, Calvin, and others. Under these circumstances a failure to raise the question of a test for moral standards, in order to find which are Chris-

¹⁰ W. R. Inge, *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*, p. 12.

tian, is as surprising as it is common. The drag of tradition combines with inertia of spirit to settle Christian ethics down at an arbitrary stopping point, content to rest in self-contradiction and to ignore the ever-expanding spirit which is Christianity.¹¹ Not all appointed Christian teachers are fully competent in these matters.

The logic of the movement toward locating the Christian element in moral reflection in the teachings of some outstanding Christian leader finds its *reductio ad absurdum* in a view which locates the Christian norm in the conscience of a sincere Christian. This approach marks out a fifth road. In one instance at least, the logic anticipated the march of time. Rather I should say that long ago a great thinker, in a sense the first completely modern Christian, put down what many Christians are accepting in practice even more widely than in theory. Schleiermacher was confronted by a naturalistic rationalism which in ethics glorified eighteenth century utilitarianism. He understood the logic by which this outlook had been coined. He rejected that standpoint unqualifiedly. Christianity could not eke out a living by crumbs from the table of rationalism. He bounded across the artificial chasm between man and his world to land in the hidden recesses of the human heart. Accordingly,

The Christian doctrine of morals should be the presentation of communion with God which is conditioned by communion with Christ the Redeemer, so far as it is the motive of all acts of the Christian—that manner of action which proceeds from the supremacy of the Christian religious self-consciousness.¹²

Obviously a moral principle is Christian when it expresses the conviction of a sincerely religious person within the Christian household of faith. If Christian ethics surrenders thus to the deep convictions of professing Christians, it has

¹¹ Cf. A. G. Widgery, *Christian Ethics in History and Modern Life*, p. 4, and the collaboration of moral opinion on various topics throughout the book.

¹² *Christliche Sitten*, p. 33.

stopped little short of complete subjectivism. Individualism at least can do no better job at insulating the problem. Christian morality is a by-product of the Christian faith of an individual.

Already Schleiermacher has advanced us toward a clearer recognition of a final alternative approach. All along one assumption has been hovering near. Now, it should declare itself. More strictly speaking, a Christian ethics means a theological ethics; in this case, a deduction of practical principles from a specifically Christian theology. In the large the contention stresses the one-way dependence of morality upon religion, and hence of ethics upon theology. In this general form we have met the idea before. It is generally assumed and seldom questioned. It would be pertinent to raise the question, when is theology Christian? That would be unkind as well as futile. If we started out on that quest we might not find the way back in time. Instead we will look briefly at its more specific formulation where Christian ethics comprises the moral implications of Christian theism.

Central in that postulational basis is the Christian concept of God. Here special attention is due to the unusual care taken to retain the God concept of religious faith. "The Protestant reformers revolted," writes Alban Widgery, "against Scholastic intellectualism to turn again to a simple faith in God as a felt personal relationship."¹³ This idea seems to have carried weight with leaders like Luther and Calvin, the lights to which much of Protestantism continues to look today. How they arrived at this concept is not pressed too closely. Calvin held that God gave to all "an apprehension of His existence," but the Scripture brings together and unifies our otherwise confused notions, "dispels the darkness and gives us a clear view of the true God." One wonders whether Calvin read the Scriptures understandingly. Or, did he construct a high-sounding theory in defense of an inherited notion? At any rate his own "clear idea of God," however

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

obtained, contributes to the world's collection of caricatures of the God of righteous love.

Two questions of first magnitude arise to plague this general position. One, how is this religious God concept arrived at? The answer, "by revelation," always stands guard. A recrudescent Calvinism dotes on offering false alternatives. Either a constricted view of experience or "we are thrown back on God's own revelation."¹⁴ By excluding "any observation and thinking of our own" God is placed beyond the reach of philosophical criticism. While it may be true that "moral surrender to God is the cardinal idea of Christianity,"¹⁵ Christian ethics would do well to stay clear of any deductive system, where the foundational principles are left in the cloudland of an indolent piety.

It is amazing what nice things are said about God as the source of Christian principles, which in a forgetful later moment can be transposed into stupid and even devilish councils. Except for this incongruity, our second question might have been lost. If the religious concept of God was arrived at apart from a study of moral experience, how come that He is known as goodness? For, granted that God contrived some way of declaring His righteousness to men, apart from man's apprehension in duty, how could we understand His language? And if a one-way, unapprehended revelationism be discarded, how do theologians find out so much about God? The only alternative appears to be that some theologians put the rabbit under the hat to begin with, and later deny the infamy. How much longer will this tremendously significant problem of the relation between religion and morality, between Christian ethics and Christian theology, be resolved by doubtful assumption? After nearly twenty centuries, it should be possible to see that Kant was right when he declared that a theological ethics is wrong in principle. That is about as far off base as anything can get.

¹⁴ Karl Heim, *God Transcendent*, p. 236 (Tr. in 1936).

¹⁵ C. Gore, *Christian Moral Principles*, p. 41.

Such a tradition lives on by a measure of truth it harbors. That truth forms the core of any ethical system, Christian or otherwise. Its central idea can be simply stated. Morality essentially is not a human invention, but an expression of the ultimate nature of reality. Moral distinctions, therefore, signify an irreducible difference between right and wrong, good and evil, righteousness and sin, justice and injustice. The two propositions go together. Moral judgments can have full meaning only if moral values are cosmically real, and vice versa. A science of nature is possible only because nature constitutes an objectively given part of reality. So with the world of values. But when a theological ethics makes an easy postulate of the nature of God, ignoring His revelation in the moral life, the whole case is given away, both for a Christian ethics and a Christian faith. Even if it were true that moral objectivity can be grounded only on a theological base, this is not the road to that base. As a matter of fact, Christianity has in practice outlived any of its theories of theological ethics. Taken at its best Christian ethics, and quite apart from this defective explanation, has sought through the centuries to express a demand—an importunate demand that men continually seek a higher way of living. As if it were a voice interpreting an eternal moral law, Christian ethics employs terms which imply nothing less than a final destiny. It has personified the moral law as the plea of the divine Father, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." And the Christian response rings in the words: "The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things which please Him." But can a grasp of the Divine will be left to an uncritical theology or to a vague pointing of direction?

V. RECENT CONSTRUCTIONS

It is easy to overlook the importance of this combined exhortation and demand. To underrate its value would be a serious mistake. Like an eternal sentinel on a rocky coast Christianity has called to the seamen its word of warning and

direction. The value we attach to the moral integrities of a democratic way of life bears mute testimony to the service which our elementary Christian ethics has been able to give.

In the last decade a notable interest has developed in a Christian ethics. There is among us a growing sense of its function, and a suspicion that all is not well with past efforts in constructing a valid ethics. At one point these recent writers might have learned much from an older work. Forty years ago Newman Smyth opened his *Christian Ethics* with an avowed intention of breaking with an authoritarian tradition and of making an empirical approach. He sets out from "the determinative fact" that the Christian ideal has found concrete embodiment in an actual personality. "We find firm footing," he wrote, "in the historical realization of the divine idea of man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."¹⁶ In this attempt he failed eminently. The pull of heredity was too strong, and the tramway of tradition too smooth. Nevertheless, he had located the crucial point. He had surrendered the absurd notion of a self-authenticating revelation. He had shunned the indolence of a speculative theology, which postulates its foundations and then spends its time gathering props to hold them up. He evidently desired that Christian ethics should be independent, empirical, and normative.

Among recent constructions there has been an intensification of contrast between a Christian ethics and contemporary ethical naturalisms. That the association has been rejected marks a clear step in advance. Nicolas Berdyaev, for example, wants ethics to be after a manner empirical. God, man, the world, form one unitary life. Ethics has its "scientific aspect," but it is even more fundamentally ontological in character. Ethics "must be a revelation of a clear conscience, unclouded by social conventions; it must be a *critique of pure conscience*."¹⁷ The real basis for morality must be provided "beyond good and evil." Evidently he is thinking of morals as a

¹⁶ Page 52.

¹⁷ *The Destiny of Man*, p. 22 (1937).

history of approved standards. Therefore, one of the major tasks of ethics is to deliver morality from "social terrorism."¹⁸ Almost immediately following he plunges into a questionable theologically grounded scheme for his ethical outlook.

Other writers show a less carefully oriented approach, and in the temper of a Justin Martyr observe that "whatever has been rightly said by all men is the property of us Christians." They are concerned with a statement of the principles of a Protestant theological ethics, and with suggestions toward their application to concrete problems.¹⁹ Reference has already been made to the liberalizing attitude shown by A. R. Osborn's *Christian Ethics*. Another most interesting example of a synthetic approach is found with a recent Gifford Lecturer. One revealing paragraph brings out the eclectic temper, but shows the need for caution in this connection.

We have maintained that Christian morality has shown itself to be uniquely assimilative, and for that reason is uniquely capable of development. It garners whatsoever is morally sound in the societies into which it is introduced, and makes the most of its gains. Thus it ever carries forward into new historic situations the wisdom gathered from the old, and, while ever retaining its hold on the past, is ever able to sustain the demand of the future. It can associate itself with the forward movement its own colour and direction. Yet in this double process of assimilation and development Christian morality never loses, though it sometimes endangers and obscures, its individuality, or fails to preserve its identity with its origin and vital principles. For it is anchored fast to its historic Source. In its Founder it possesses an unalterable norm of truth, alike theological and moral. His teaching and example embody the ideas which must determine Christian faith and conduct through all the changes and chances of Time. Above the bewildering scene of ecclesiastical history, so full of mutation, so shadowed by paradox, stands the legend which gives the key to its interpretation and proclaims the secret of the Finality which Christian morality alone possesses—"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yea and forever."²⁰

¹⁸ Page 26 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*. (Published in 1932; translated in 1937.)

²⁰ H. H. Henson, *Christian Morality*, p. 295.

Some elements in the picture invite special attention. First, there is the commendable open door policy that is ready to admit truth, regardless of its more immediate embodiment. In that attitude a prime regard is shown for truth and validity. Moreover the moral situation falls within its naturally inclusive context. But can we afford to be so confident about what Christian writers have selected for approval? Second, can the composite and cumulative character of Christian ethics be taken so confidently? Yes, because Christian ethics is in possession of certain "original and vital principles." Suppose, however, there is no general agreement about those very regulative principles. That changes the picture. Third, comes the appeal to the concrete standard of the moral personality of Jesus. Yet, as is clearly indicated, a multiplicity of interpretations of Jesus confronts us. Which of these are to be taken as authoritative in making a test? And can an assurance easily be gained that the personality concept selected coincides with the morally unique Jesus? A solution to these problems would prove an incalculable advantage to such a Christian ethics.

Quite naturally an approach to a Christian ethics is guided by a double consideration. Principles that are basically Christian must if possible be discovered, and those principles should be related to the task of practical guidance. A concern with principles brings up our distinction between the descriptive and the normative connotation of Christian. The matter of relevancy of those principles is forced to the forefront by the involvement of Christianity in the salvation of men. On this latter point there is an especially notable expression in Reinhold Niebuhr's *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*.²¹ At the outset, Niebuhr holds, a Christian ethics must differentiate itself from other counterfeit varieties. Orthodoxy has entangled itself with an outmoded science, and prematurely identifies authoritarian moral codes with the transcendent

²¹ New York: Harper Brothers, 1935.

will of God.²² Liberal Christianity has accommodated itself to current scientific lore, but is inclined "to invest the relative moral standards of a commercial age with ultimate sanctity by falsely casting the aura of the absolute and transcendent ethic of Jesus upon them."²³ Both of them are infected with a single major weakness. They quickly assimilate the will of God with limited human traditions about that will.

In the next step Niebuhr undertakes to establish an independent Christian ethic, independent in the double sense of standing in judgment upon moral codes and of grounding itself in the transcendent will of God. The prophetic movement in the Hebraic religion worked at such a transcendent ethics. Historic Christianity has manifest the inclination to deviate from that course by absorption in sacramentarianism and a mystic otherworldliness. An independent Christian ethics stands apart from either an ascetic world-denying morality or the prudentialism of naturalistic utilitarianism. It "proceeds logically from the presuppositions of prophetic religion," which means that it is grounded in God the creator and judge of the world.²⁴ Therefore an independent ethics can have "only a vertical dimension between the loving will of God and the will of man."²⁵ The problem consists in finding a mediator of the transcendent will of God. The ethics of Jesus constitutes Niebuhr's solution. With Jesus neither natural impulses nor social consequences are considered. His demands are issued purely in the terms of religion. "The points of reference are vertical and not horizontal."²⁶ It follows that the only motive is that of absolute obedience to God or emulation of his nature.

Since, however, the relevance of a Christian ethics forms a basic consideration, that calls for an interpretation of human nature. After all the will of God must elicit response

²² Page 9.

²³ Pages 9-10.

²⁴ Page 37.

²⁵ Page 39.

²⁶ Page 46; cf. p. 51 *et al.*

from the moral agent. Niebuhr's doctrine of human nature has been worked out in connection with the Christian conception of sin. The natural man is conceived in and shaped by self-interest. Its pervasive depths are manifest in "that human egoism can corrupt even the most ultimate hopes and make them the basis for self-seeking. It is as pathetic as it is natural that human sin should express itself finally in an effort to corrupt the ultimate hope of the human spirit."²⁷ Egoism here becomes a perfect foil for moral transcendence. Then, things begin to happen in quick succession. Ideal Christian ethics becomes "an impossible possibility." In order to obtain relevance a second and compromise Christian ethics must be constructed, because, according to certain theologians and to naturalistic psychologies, man's rationality is forever supporting the illusion of a finite absolute.²⁸ Christian ethics forever forces a modification of these standards. A realistic Christian ethics must therefore work out the best solution possible under these circumstances. A third Christian ethics emerges when a bridge is built between one and two by a golden rule ethics. The heart of this ethics is "the obligation of affirming the life and interests of the neighbor as much as those of the self."²⁹

The golden rule Christian ethics supplies the key to relevancy. Given on the one hand, a transcendent will of God in strict vertical relation to the human situation; and on the other, an egocentric human nature supported by its own cultural creations—one central task emerges. Or, does it? If the perfect law of love can be brought to bear upon the situation with sufficient urgency to bring the self to apply the elemental rule of fair play, you obtain a golden rule regime. But what do you have when the morally blind lead the blind, even though they work in all sincerity? Supplement this situation with a gospel of forgiveness, and

²⁷ Page 55; Compare pp. 50, 67, 85, 90, 114, 148.

²⁸ Page 117 ff.

²⁹ Page 110.

something has been gained. Then rule out "collective man," and make love a possibility only for the individual.³⁰ What then? A fatal germ at the heart of the system has been overlooked. The sincere and impartial individual tries to foist upon others his own limited ideas of the right and the good. Then, too, following impartially the pure love ethics must fail because after all the individual must apprehend its meaning. He cannot jump away from his human nature in order to accomplish that feat. No, this counsel of distributionism for the good misses the mark on two counts. You cannot divide trash and get grain; and, an overdone human depravity makes the will of God finally irrelevant. Once the artificial chasm between God and man has been made, only a painted bridge can unite them.

VI. SOME CONCLUSIONS AND SILENT ASSUMPTIONS

An inventory of the high points in the development of recent constructions in Christian ethics makes several things quite clear. In the first place, considerable progress has been made. Such progress has become articulate in many ways, four of which can be enumerated here. (1) The subject matter of Christian ethics has shifted toward emphasis upon the New Testament perspective, especially toward the ethical teachings of Jesus. The ethical standards of the Bible as a whole are no longer put on a parity with the Sermon on the Mount. (2) The principle of moral development has been quite generally accepted. Attempts to defend the actions of certain Old Testament heroes have steadily diminished. The principle of limitations which Saint Paul himself acknowledged becomes increasingly clear.³¹ (3) There is a growing sense that Christian ethics should operate in the daily life of persons and should hasten the construction of an economic and social order more favorable to the growth of Christian character. A growing number among us recog-

³⁰ Chap. VII.

³¹ I Cor. VII, 25 f.

nize the seriousness of a charge that Christian ethics is a puny irrelevance. The rapid extension and interdependence of the vices associated with our economic profit system with political corruption and a materialistic philosophy of life cannot be ignored. (4) Finally, a notable interest in the moral side of our Christian faith shows a healthy growth in appreciation of the deeper intent of Christianity. It is not uncommon to meet significant ideas suggested by opening sentences of a recent volume by Canon Barry on *Christianity and the New World*:

Incomparably the most imperious challenge which today confronts Christianity is the moral chaos of our generation. What is required is less demonstration that this or that behaviour is "wrong," than a constructive philosophy of life, which candidly faces all the new factors which have entered into the moral situation to make it both more delicate and more complex, and offers genuinely positive leadership. That is the task before Christianity. We have to vindicate the moral validity and creativeness of the Christian faith when drawn to the scale of the new maps, on the twentieth-century projection of a ceaseless evolutionary process unfolding itself through the cosmic system.

At last it begins to look as if the import of our unsatisfactory moral situation is dawning upon us. Some of our smug self-satisfaction has given way, and one can gratefully look out upon troubled waters. Christian ethics begins to become a problem. After all a Christian must live in the world. His morality must relate itself realistically to the human situation.

In the second place, Christian ethics has turned out to be not a simple and unambiguous presentation. There is heartening news in a recent summary made at one of the ecumenical conferences: "The presupposition that there is a fundamental unity among Christians on the question of ethics proved to be an oversimplification of the real situation."³² That conclusion is amply justified. Its basis is clearly indicated by a comparison of what we have just witnessed with the perspective of first century Christianity. Salvation was conceived

³² J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its Function in Society*, p. 79.

in moral terms. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another." What that means Jesus of Nazareth lived out. He constitutes the greatest single asset of the Christian movement. The Greek sage was in part the construction of rational imagination; the oriental wise man represents a magnificent ideal; the good man in a Christian sense lived and taught. Now Jesus came preaching the good news of a divine ideal for human relations. He called it the kingdom of God. To those who claimed to live by identical principles, he calmly said: "You are mistaken." "For I say unto you, that except your justice exceed the justice of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven." What they usually put first, a God of righteous love, he said, values least. And this Divine will is the foundation for the moral requirements in the new order by which human salvation comes. His daring claim was that he had discovered the meaning of salvation. "Live as sons in a realm of righteous love; be like your Father, God." Some who knew him well said that he lived with the authority of truth. On this basis Christian moralists should appeal not to an *ipsissima verba* of any leader, or to an abstract universal law. Their greatest advantage arises from the fact that Christianity's moral ideal became incarnate in an historical person. He lived the saved life, and so Christianity has advanced the claim that his spirit constitutes the answer to the universal demand of a morally good life.

In the third place, Christian ethics has not yet won its independence from a domination by theological method. *First* among the silent assumptions in religious circles is to the effect that Christian ethics is grounded in theology. It has been allowed to function silently in the background, without examination of its meaning. The loss can be charged up both to ethics and to theology. Aside from the half-hearted sortie made by Newman Smyth near the close of the nineteenth century no well-known volume so much as seriously raises the problem. That whole question is settled by de-

fault. Attention is shifted to a resuscitation of Christian ethics by clarifying its theological foundations. In this way the association of ethics with theology operates to forestall an objective study of the basic problem.

Within our theologically dominated tradition a whole nest of faulty assumptions huddle together. Chief among a *second* class is the notion that a one-way dependence of morality upon religion encompasses the entire issue. Our discussions have indicated a mutuality and complexity of relationship that invite exploration. A simple assumption which harbors a partial truth is not open-minded exploration. A second assumption lives upon a confusing of theological framework with the essence of morality. Without doubt morality is essentially constituted by the objective reality of moral values. They are not a human invention for temporal convenience. Moral values belong to the cosmically given structure of things. But can objectivity of moral value be easily identified with a theological framework for ethics? By no means. There are theologies of many kinds. A sound Christian theism implicates an ethical theory. That is an important truth about which so many lies cluster. But neither a sound Christian theism nor a Christian ethics can be achieved, either by unexamined assumption or a one-way dependence notion.

A *third* silent partner stalks abroad in religious circles with all the poise of truth. It holds that a sincere Christian faith automatically produces a morally good life. The failure to do so is not confined to defective practice. Faith does not automatically bring adequate moral insight. Faith of the right kind inspires a person to seek it, but that is something else. History speaks much on the contrary theme. Scarcely any infamy known to human ingenuity has not at some time enjoyed the benign approval of a "Christian" conscience. One would have a difficult time with a thesis to the effect that rank and file Christians show a superior sense of moral values in their philosophy of life. Rare exceptions, of course,

illuminate the highroad across the centuries. Included in the rank-and-file category are the majority of ministers, administrators, and teachers. It is simply untrue that a sincere profession of Christian faith guarantees quality in moral understanding. Opportunities considered, Christians are deplorable in moral illiteracy. Like the good people about whom Jesus spoke, religion oftentimes sanctifies their prejudices until they are actually made worse by it. Sincerity is indispensable; it is scarcely able singlehanded to explore the height and the depth of moral experience. To assume the contrary invites a deadly form of deception. After piling the evidence mountain-high, Kirby Page once wrote: "It is a dangerous delusion to assume that a person who makes a sincere confession of faith in Christ will hereafter lead an ethical life."³³

Additional support comes to the rescue in a *fourth* contention to the effect that only religious faith can supply moral dynamic, and only faith can provide the breach in experience necessary to put over on corrupt human nature a moral perspective. The two contentions go together. Christians generally have made much of the dogma of "inherited corruption." A natural egoism, it is held, so far rules human nature that a voluntary and uncoerced kindness between individuals is a fleeting intrusion, like a flake of snow on a river, a moment white, then gone forever. Human nature being what it is, the ideal of Christian love is an impossibility. The Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful ideal. It is simply impractical. That is why we live by only realistic approximations of it. Only faith in God can bring our halting nature to bridge the chasm which separates us from the law of love. "The Christian doctrine of love is thus the most adequate metaphysical and psychological framework for the approximation of the ideal of love in human life."³⁴ Such love, he tells us, is the fruit of grace and of faith.³⁵

³³ *Jesus or Christianity*, p. 278.

³⁴ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Undoubtedly any view which looks to the love of God as the basic motive of a Christian life faces in the right direction. There is a profound sense in which love for God marks the ultimate in human motivation. What I wish to point out is that this latter proposition is very different from the current view with which we began. What I question most is a double assumption: First, the postulation of a human nature that isolates man wholly from God; second, that our ordinary appreciation of moral ideals is a detached fisheye stare, so that appreciation is *per se* impotent. Instead, by taking human experience in its given divine context, it appears that our goodness is indeed the work of God. His grace operates, but *in* and *through* the conditions provided by the basic structures of human experience. What we ordinarily call faith is only one of those conditions, and by no means self-sufficient. For faith and love are themselves variables which need to be carefully nurtured and stringently refined. Hence the love which matches it may take on very different qualities. In general we need to distinguish between love as a sentiment and love as profound appreciation. Sentiment is cheap and bubbles up to meet any psychologically manipulated occasion. Love as an ever-deepening moral insight is terribly costly and very perilous. At once it represents the highest human achievement and bears witness to the miracles of divine grace. But the miracles of God's grace contain no magic. They observe the fundamental conditions and uniformities of a growing moral freedom in a human personality who loves God supremely. In that case only, does a Christian know how to discover the values approved by the willing of God.

If this sketch of the development of a Christian ethics comes anywhere near the truth, there is no room for complacency. Something more is needed than pep talks to get Christians to do something. First, because our so-called first principles are inadequate and defective. We need enlightenment to direct our devotion, enthusiastic or otherwise. Sec-

ond, the Christian point of view penetrates into the inward side of moral experience, and specializes on the clean heart. Leslie Stephen thought so well of this accent that he tried to incorporate it into a system of ethics quite incompatible with it. His statement deserves to be better known. "Christianity," he wrote, "gave prominence to the doctrine that the true moral law says 'hate not,' instead of 'kill not.' The men of old time had forbidden adultery; the new moral legislation forbade lust; and his greatness as a moral teacher was manifested in nothing more than in the clearness with which he gave utterance to this doctrine. It would be easy to show how profoundly the same doctrine, in various forms, has been bound up with other moral and religious reformations in many ages of the world."³⁶ Third, the miracle of goodness is wrought not by magical formulae, but by exploring the value realities that give significance to personal achievement within the conditions provided by an intelligible spiritual world order. Education of a very specific kind names that method.

If Christianity set out as a way of salvation by teaching men to live in the spirit of righteous love, a spirit whose quality is measured by the Divine Father, some next steps are rather clear. If the early disciples were sufficiently impressed by the moral integrity of Jesus to leave all else and follow him, so that they were known as the people of the WAY, we have presumptive evidence in favor of a new kind of Christian ethics. Add to this the important fact that the moral outlook of Jesus more nearly than any other validates itself in the sweep of human experience. It follows that if Christianity through the centuries has been unable to retain and to clarify the moral flavor of salvation, not much of distinctive assets are left. Which way Christianity? Along the broad road we have been traveling it appears that Christianity may one day find itself under the sentence not of a merciful death, but of a perverted life.

³⁶ *The Science of Ethics*, p. 148.

What Must We Do?

WHEN Christianity left the formative hand of the apostle Paul and found its new home with the church fathers, the mutuality and balance between faith and practice was greatly disturbed. For one thing, an Oriental faith was making itself at home in the Western world. The transpositions effected were enormous. In the nature of the case a tremendous ferment was initiated by the necessities of a creed-building era. Christianity had to differentiate itself from other religions. Then came the turmoil of new problems brought on by racial migrations, and the struggle for social and political prestige. In Augustinianism the battle of conscience was lost to theology. For a thousand years critical questions about its fate were not even raised. That remains a solid section of our heritage.

I. DISCOVER WHERE WE ARE

What must we do? That depends, among other things, upon where we stand today. So runs the homely common-sense observation made by Lincoln in a famous "House Divided against Itself" speech. Just where are we Christians now with respect to this issue? What about the caliber of the moral side of our faith? From our vantage point it looks as if our fathers developed their perspective in a checkered manner. Consequently, they have been rather vocal in a confession of faith, and somewhat shoddy on the side of ethical principles and practice.

To determine where we stand today on the identical issue does not turn out to be a simple task. Formative forces become more clear only as the stream of events has spent itself. Our backward look is usually more enlightened than our foresight or contemporaneous analysis. What remains is for each of us to look through his window and report,

waiting for others to observe and supplement the record. We begin with the chief councils of organized Christianity in recent years. According to that analysis our principal need lies in an enthusiastic propagation of the faith. Using faith somewhat inclusively, we must inject vigor into our religious devotion. Forces of secularism are gaining an upper hand, because we serve the causes of our religious faith with so little sense of urgency. The hour is getting late, but still we make haste all too deliberately, if not leisurely. We lack passion, enthusiasm, push, thoroughness of dedication. Not infrequently are we chided by the unmeasured dedication of those who serve in totalitarian ranks. Theirs is the heroic dedication which once inspired the rank-and-file Christians.

In line with the temper of this analysis with its summons for a passionate devotionism, there develops a kind of Pollyanna futurism. There is a better day coming. When in the realm of thought religion beats a steady retreat in the face of the phenomenal growth of the sciences, we reaffirm a confidence that religious faith stands unimpaired. During each crucial struggle in the last four hundred years organized religion first reaffirmed its stand in opposition to newer developments, then compromised, and later hailed the new position as a moral victory for religion. As time goes on the temper of compromise has increased, even where the issues are not clearly drawn and without a primary concern with the truth of the ideas involved. At the same time the tempo of celebrating new victories has been accelerated. Religion, you know, is now ready to appropriate scientific lore, without too much concern whether the lore be genuinely scientific; or, what is more likely, it is ready to form an alliance with a cheap variety of naturalistic philosophy parading as science.

On the practical front something less tangible and more perplexing is developing. The processes by which we earn our daily bread are becoming more completely secularized. Whatever the slogan, an abundance of evidence mounts to

indicate that what we call business has less and less deference for a moralized religion. Ever since the revolt which followed the weakening of the Scholastic view of religious authority, the lines of moral restraint have very generally diminished. It is too plain for audible comment that in eras of economic and political stress, the voice of our Christian ethics becomes more subdued. Wherefore two inferences put in appearance. One is that economic and political powers have immeasurably increased during the modern period. In that case, the compliance of religion becomes an action dictated by world wisdom. On the other alternative, Christians are slowly becoming aware that conscience has been too frequently all too certain about itself. Without having paid the price for an evidential basis for its certainty, it has sometimes unwisely declared its convictions. That memory encourages humility, and suggests that here again reticence will serve the ends of prudence. In either case economics and politics are serving notice of a declaration of independence from religious criticism.¹ If that means Christianity is destined to become less potent as a leaven for a good human society, the days of its distinctive efficacy are numbered.

Alongside such a chastened attitude a very different temper is at work. Devotees of religious faith have in them an unquenchable zeal for their cause. An awareness of failures and of limitations is for one thing psychologically incompatible. The opposite mood obtains strong support. For most part Christians are today working the ambulance complex overtime. In the face of a second world war within a single generation, strong reactions are called forth. Christians watch civilizations dissolve, the good in them along with the evil, and presume that after the storm, the church will help clean up the wreckage and build anew. To all this the only pertinent answer is, that unless Christians develop a better philoso-

¹ See C. F. Taeusch, *Policy and Ethics in Business*, and H. F. Ward, *Our Economic Morality*, Chapter I.

phy of life their part in tomorrow's world will be very disappointing to the world.

Enthusiasm apart from a better faith will bring an added liability. Enthusiastic devotion to wrong ends means deviltry that is very far from being Christian. A mere devotionism reduces religion to the level of fanaticism. Ahead of any new brand of enthusiasm there must go the light of a better faith. Obviously, both the faith and the love which we have has failed, when measured by rightful standards. A fading bibliolatry which has held sway in Protestantism cannot meet our need. That point of view has been tried and found wanting. We cannot afford to be misled into making a fresh sally in that direction. To put the matter most charitably, a misused Bible faith is daily rendered less relevant to our situation.

In the first place, it has made Christian ethics the asylum of respectable moral opinions, among people who call themselves Christians. People who judge themselves by themselves, as Paul once pointed out, usually come to the conclusion that they are quite good folks. Secondly, this outlook has disparaged the need for cultivating a critical moral judgment, one based upon a forthright concern in the moral life for its own sake. Third, as a consequence Christians are, considering their profession and their opportunity, engulfed by a ponderous moral illiteracy. As a general rule, Christians show no more acute moral insight than their social peers. On some highly important questions they show perceptibly less. This is not to say that Christians are never the salt of many an earthly situation. Very often they are just that. The question before us is, whether their Christian calling has added its due measure to their moral stature? The odds stand against expecting a convincingly affirmative answer. Finally, one consequence which follows is that often Christians fall a prey to conventional moral relativity theories. That frequently appears as the alternative to an irrelevant ethics. Unwittingly an increasing number of Christians be-

come advocates of a counterfeit outlook in ethics. Their superficial view of right and justice as approved modes of social behavior makes them inconsistent deniers of the faith they profess.

Pick up almost any book on Christian ethics or article which tries to face up to the religious situation, and you will find one invariable theme—the plaint about moral confusion. Most significant of all is the minor chord which berates our loss of moral ideals, the collapse of conscience, and our “lapsed morality.” The assumptions which underlie such a position are instructive. Their appearance spells chaos, and most of them disdain the light of day. To begin with, Christians supposedly have an adequate moral insight. They know what is right. Do they? Whence did they obtain that moral understanding? From the Bible? From what part of it? From the creeds? Which ones are concerned with moral insight? From the teaching of the church? What branch of what church? Where can the documents be found? How many Christians pay the price of moral integrity as the condition of moral insight? Here a man’s vision is a by-product of his character. Only the pure in heart shall ever see the will of God clearly.

A second cluster of assumptions centers upon the instability of conscience. Why do Christian consciences fold up with such distressing frequency and completeness? One common answer is that human nature contains such brittle material. That reply hardly seems adequate, in view of a long list of worthy heroes, such as Socrates and Jesus. The unsung heroes we daily meet testify to the mettle that is in human nature. On the contrary, the astounding quality of character in people who constitute the lights of our twilight civilization suggests that the trouble lies elsewhere. Perhaps it is time to face the disquieting fact that not many consciences have been authentically Christian. The fragile conscience which is forever slipping through our fingers in shattered bits was unable to stand the pressure of life situations. Consciences,

we know, crash with distressing results. But were they ever Christian in the significant sense of being morally robust? That question makes insistent demands. For, if a genuinely robust Christian conscience collapsed so easily, there would be good reason to hesitate about its unqualified commendation.

A third set of assumptions cluster about the impotence of a Christian conscience. Various alternative explanations have gained currency. One is that our knowledge of moral ideals leaves the personality detached. Knowing is here a fisheye stare at an ideal, just across a chasm. So it is possible to consider a moral end of action without the slightest provocation to respond. Moral ideals can be quite indifferent to the person who envisions them. Accordingly we know what is right and fail utterly to do. Our weakness lies in the will. Whether by reason of our inheritance or training, the will seems indisposed to commit the whole personality to acknowledged moral ideals.

On second thought, this picture of a detached knowing process applied to our awareness of moral values, and of an equally abstract will, lacks foundation. Psychologically, man's nature knows no such compartmental divisions. Appreciation of values is a process that taps the innermost resources of a personality. Vision and personal commitment are complementary sides of the one process. They live and grow together. Willing is implicated as an integral part of appreciation. In principle appreciation is already willing. One does not precede or follow the other; they mutually condition each other. If so, the suggestion lies at hand that impotence in conscience calls for a different diagnosis. In all probability the moral insight about which we complain is largely an illusion. A superficial grasp of moral ideals is doubly impotent. It lacks a penetrating hold upon the whole personality. Then, too, a shallow vision cannot make sure its grasp upon the object of devotion. Its uncritical nature overlooks the fundamental issue concerning the worth of pro-

posed moral ideals. In this all-important area of morality counterfeit attractions are always bidding for the uninitiated. Counterfeit ideals of living should if possible be rendered still more impotent, in order to send disillusioned souls in quest of ideals that are everlasting reals.

Finally, this talk about a "lapsed morality" is beside the point, not only because one cannot lose what he never possessed, but because it sets moral development in a reversed perspective. The golden age of man's moral maturity does not lie in the past. What moral attainment reflects to the honor of our ancestors, was won by them on the basis of a developing moral-spiritual vision. Jesus stands ahead of the prophets, with grateful acknowledgment for their hard-won victories. He summoned men to come after him in a new spirit of living, not to recover an imaginary lost moral estate of their ancestors. The plainest evidence we have indicates that our chief handicaps have been an obtuseness of moral insight, a willingness to halt our march beside some mediocre moral spring, to enjoy the rewards of adolescent sentimentality as if they were the acme of perfection. In the fevered excitement of times which try the souls of men it is easy to raise the cry for the return to days of spiritual health that were supposed to have been experienced but never saw the light of day.

Never has the world had more moral resources than today. More moral vision lives in current personalities and institutions than at any previous era of history. Our distress comes less from any real moral degeneration than from the fact that in so many respects our environing world has bequeathed to us a new house. The world around us has outstripped our moral growth. Likewise our hope lies not by any return to the dreamworld of lost ideals. Nothing but an accelerated moral development can serve our purpose. That growth begins by a critical appraisal of our approved ways, and a careful exploration of the spiritual resources of human life in our world.

II. REVISE OUR VIEW OF THE BIBLE

In all humility we Christians should take stock of our situation. It is high time to shed our self-complacency and censoriousness toward the world. Beyond that are very definite steps that lie before us. Among the first advances should be an improved perspective of the Bible. Protestants have assigned to the Scriptures a unique place in the process of faith building. Recent historical studies of the Bible have been engaged in revolutionizing our conception of its composition, nature and purpose. Great gains have come because of these studies. But something like a stalemate has been reached. A few blind alleys have been uncovered. Some disappointing by-products even suggest to a few a return to the Bible as the fountainhead of Christian faith. Return is a catchword that loudly reverbrates during difficult days. Frequently return means a going back to an authoritarian interpretation. Timid souls under the duress of catastrophic events can think only of running to shelter by the old landmarks. A second group who understand the illusion of a literal return in a growing spiritual order, take comfort in spiritualized interpretation. While professing allegiance to the results of historical studies, they nevertheless appeal to the word of God in the Scriptures. In it they resuscitate certain dogmas about revelation and allow their pontifical tones to generate an emotional certainty. All sounds well until you look for evidence. Still others who reject authoritarianism in both of these forms find it congenial to dilate on the devotional value of the Book. They are ready on occasion to say that if there is to be a revival of Christian faith it will come only by a renewed study of the Scriptures. All in all, it looks as if Protestants are dusting off for use their favorite formula about the Holy Scriptures containing the sufficient rule of faith and morals.

In this plea for the use of the Bible is involved an old truth that should be made boldly explicit. A clear recogni-

tion of it would doubtless improve our perspective both of the Bible and of Christian faith. No formulation of it is all-sufficient. No magic is implicated, only hard work. The Bible symbolizes the march of the God of Jesus through human history, and the moral regeneration of men by the indwelling of His holy spirit of completely righteous love. In it is no final set of divine commandments, no manual of directions for solving all moral problems, no finished revelation of God's will. The Book grows out of adventures in living out a developing religious faith. In it are pictures of how a people, during approximately ten centuries and under widely different conditions, worked at their moral problems. Always under the lure of divine love they advanced in growth toward full-fledged sons of the Kingdom. Biblical writings therefore come out of life situations. They reflect the warmth of human limitation and aspiration in response to the developing sense of the divine purpose. Here are mileposts of moral progress, considered as an integral part of religious faith. In brief, the Bible is a source book which records the increasing success of God in getting His will enthroned in human affairs, illuminates the matchless love which enfolds human life, giving meaning to the world and to the historical process, and envisages the response of men that shall remove the last barrier to the triumph of His righteous will upon the earth.

The Bible, then, has universal appeal in that it works at the most significant of human problems. Its shafts of light can be made to fall across our minds. In all essentials our deepest human problems are part of an ongoing unitary experience. Can we rise to the heights from which we can regard these ancient Scriptures as one increasing light from God across the span of human history?

III. MAKE CHRISTIAN ETHICS INDEPENDENT, EMPIRICAL, VALID

Christian ethics should no longer be made a trifling matter. For those who sense the need for developing the moral side

of our religious faith a second clear step begins to emerge from our studies. Christian ethics must be taken from a consequential position where it drags along as a tail on a theological kite. Nor can it be left to vague surmise, that its work will somehow take care of itself. A befuddled appeal to conscience so common in our time is just another evasion and rationalization. The arguments are circular. They posit in conscience what is later to be drawn out. Nothing short of a critical ethical outlook will serve us. As matters now stand, a betrayal not only of Christian ethics but of Christianity is the order of the day. If ethics is to be made Christian in a normative sense, a Christian ethics must be developed that is at once independent, empirical, and valid. That independence, like the Roman god Janus, faces in two directions at the same time. On one side, Christian ethics confronts the army of old prejudices within our religious heritage with which we have been so much concerned. We need not call them back for a review just now. It will be sufficient to renew our minds at one point. A mine-run variety of theologically grounded ethics sets moral facts in a false perspective. Its presuppositions construct a framework in which the facts of moral experience cannot stand on their own merits and speak for themselves. They are first clothed about with the royal rags of theological prejudices. Christian ethics must win its independence in the sense of allowing moral experience to stand on its own and be counted in terms of its own intrinsic worth. Otherwise, it will be hemmed in by an unmoralized theology and can only be a truncated ethics. That means bad theology and a distorted morality. On the other side, Christian ethics faces a brand-new counterfeit ethics of which it must declare independence. With the relinquishing of rule by Scholasticism ethical reflection breathed the air of liberation. Straightway ethics divided into two branches. One is called philosophical ethics. In that tradition ethics became affiliated with an idealistic tradition in the philosophy carried on by the Cambridge Platonists,

by Butler, Kant, T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley and their successors. The second branch was directed by an ideal of a scientific ethics. It found exposition in Thomas Hobbes, and in the utilitarian tradition begun in dead earnest by Jeremy Bentham in 1789.

With this second development Christian ethics is now directly involved. The main reason is that this branch of independent ethics has completely merged with the social sciences. Since the middle of the nineteenth century a naturalistic perspective has matured, in which moral values are transposed into non-moral terms; i.e., into the historical, social and psychological qualifications that accompany moral experience and form part of its formal setting. Subsequently, morality with its distinctive meaning left out equates with morals. Morals are what yield some kinds of satisfaction to the individual or what the group approves. Ethics counts as part of a history of moral ideals and forms a chapter in the social sciences. Such a view of ethics rests upon multiple fallacies centering about a confusing of approval of standards with their validity: an interchange between the intensional dimension of a moral judgment and its concomitant historical and mental conditioning. On second thought ethical relativists should see that an approval attitude may or may not be given to a particular moral situation. It is consequential and not constitutive of validity.

The plausibility of ethical relativism centers principally about two points. First comes the important consideration of an ethics that achieves relevancy to actual situations. Certainly this is one of the qualifications of any ethical system that means to be taken seriously. Secondly, it makes abundant use of the historical and mental sciences. It is, if you will, a "scientific" ethics, but according to a limited ideal of the sciences. There are a host of other factors, but they need not concern us just now. The main point is to see that an ethics can and should be both relevant and scientific in the proper sense, without being taken in by the

fallacies of relativism. When a theory ends in self-contradiction, and even in denying the basic significance of its materials, it supplies its own best commentary.

Yet the large measure of truth in ethical relativism has given it an entree in religious circles. Mention has already been made of its place in theological seminaries. Not many years ago a prescribed course of study for non-college and non-seminary candidates for the ministry of a great denomination carried one of the most extravagant examples. It was doubtless selected because of the qualities just mentioned. With all the show of being scientific it reveled in the magic of the term "social." But its real influence arises from the much more subtle forms which ethical relativism assumes as a leaven within a general point of view. Sincere and effective Christians everywhere are captivated with ethical relativity, both because of its value and because a bare common-sense moralism is defenseless in its vigorous presence. Moral vacancies are readily claimed by this pseudo scientific offspring of ethical reflection. What better testimony of its power is required than that in religious circles the mention of morality invariably connotes conventional morals. Add to that the insipid enthusiasm accorded to questionnaire studies based upon "generally accepted standards." Morals like styles are of today and tomorrow. Their story is always fascinating and everlastingly significant. A Christian ethics, however, must also explore the principles eternally given in the structure of the universe, a universe, need it be said, within which the human enterprise is carried on as a dependent aspect.

The time has come when it should be possible to clear out the pest of false alternatives. Christian ethics need not either return to an authoritarian appeal of a speculative theology or capitulate to an ethical relativism. A brief analysis of the meaning of empiricism should further clarify our minds on that point. Christian ethics must undoubtedly be empirical. But in what sense of empirical? Certainly not in the sense of

using the methodology upon which ethical relativism relies. There empirical derives its meaning from methods devised for the physical sciences. Morality specializes with a different material, with a particular class of values. Methodology should follow, not distort its subject matter. Christian ethics must be empirical in a twofold sense. First, it should exemplify that objective-mindedness which follows where the facts of moral experience lead. Empirical is primarily a matter of a disinterested temper of mind, celebrated by the sciences but not created by them. In the second place, Christian ethics should devise a technique through which the scientific temper might work *appropriately to the distinctive subject matter at hand*. Only in that way can ethics stay close to the human situation, and learn both relevantly and objectively.

In view of our heritage, Christian ethics cannot too often be reminded that we stand on the human side of moral experience. Human here signifies a relevancy to everyday and concrete situations, and also contains a warning that our moral understanding is a growing affair. We do not have access to a one-way revelation. Revelation implies a gift only through discovery. Christian moralists stand always in the stream of historical and social life, exposed to its perils and laid hold upon by its abiding values. Therefore, our moral insight grows, in principle, as is the case with any other significant discipline. A wooden finality must constantly be repudiated, as vigorously as a tentative and skeptical relativism which dotes on the changing aspects of the knowledge process and is unaware of its logical foundations. Each possibility offered by finality and by relativity in knowledge has its special attractions. With the modern temper, of course, the advantages fall on the side of the latter. It warms the cockles of our liberated hearts to read: "Our moral authorities for the future do not provide a system of rules to be followed blindly but a set of principles to be enlarged progressively and applied intelligently."² Quantitatively the

² R. W. Sockman, *Morals of Tomorrow*, p. 241.

statement is nine-tenths true, but it is nevertheless qualitatively half-baked. Empiricism must not be allowed to appropriate the qualities of a discarded magic.

Finally, an independent and empirical Christian ethics holds inviolable the requirement to press the demands of validity. The goal of any ethics is to seek for a valid interpretation of moral experience. By this time we have seen how complicated and comprehensive the territory taken in by the term moral experience. Morality begins with morals, the customs and *mores* of a group. It examines all the facets of developing human experience which bear upon man's discernment of moral values. Included in that stroke are the historical, psychological and logical conditions of experience. Out beyond the human aspect stretches the cosmic framework within which man makes himself at home. Hence the claim to moral insight couples together due modesty for tentativeness of achievement *and* a quiet confidence in the stability of that insight as it faces in principle the intelligible grasp of reality in its wholeness. Minds that are recovering from the first shock of a disillusioned finalism should be often reminded that a vital stability informs our developing experience, and therefore the alternative to a hurried finality is a rational validity, not an evanescent relativity. Christian ethics must endeavor to become independent, empirical, and valid.

IV. CHRISTIANIZE OUR MINISTRY AND MORALIZE THEOLOGY

Standing on the base of such a Christian ethics something would necessarily happen to its inseparable companion in a Christian faith. Theology would have to open its mind for a review of its ideas. The great change involved is one of perspective. Much more attention would have to be given to the question of how Christianity is to be conceived. After that, specific doctrines could be restated to accord with a Christian outlook. But consider for a moment how Christianity should regard its function in human society. For

one thing the church as the instrument of religious living enters the picture. Christian theology and its implementation in religious institutions go hand in hand. They mutually influence each other. Unfortunately the major tendencies in our economy give the advantage to the practical instrument side. In that case Christian faith is gradually trimmed to suit the instruments available in the church. Means gets ahead of guide and goal. And the inevitable result follows in which the whole perspective is twisted toward efficiency in wielding instruments. There is no way of exaggerating the peril in which Christianity stands through the operation of these processes. Therefore one of the constant imperatives should be: Christianize the church life and its ministry.

The church is the liaison officer between Christian faith and the field where its plans are to operate. But when churchmen get too entangled in the field and their own stake in it, the faith side stands to suffer. All this comes in a very unplanned course of affairs. It belongs, as we say, to the human side of things. But what about allowing mediocre churchmen to devise an instrument more and more to their own liking. If it be that the devil improves his opportunities this is, without exception, the most likely place to begin. Piety has tremendous disarming power. Outward piety polishes up the natural disguise until angel faces appear in the reflection. The picturesque warning of Jesus about wolves in sheep's clothing belongs to the open spaces. It fails utterly to suggest the means for detecting the streamlined Uriah Heep of today. For what mediocrity cannot manage, it cannot endure. Conversely, the ambitions of little men conspire to form alliances with smaller souls that are nourished on an inferiority complex.

Christians cannot afford to ignore this brand of moral filth, because it will not stop short of defiling the cathedral and the altar. Here is an extreme reach of an instrument twisting the goal to suit its own shape. Christian faith cannot live and grow in these surroundings. Because Christianity

places a premium upon moral integrity of its disciples and in God, its faith is profoundly implicated in what transpires in church polity.

The inversion of priority in function between churchmen and Christian faith means a perverted faith. We know this quite well. For that reason when churchmen unite these functions, joy abounds and our respect increases without measure. Then a healthy perspective has been achieved. We have arrived at the fine insight of a man when he wrote: "The ultimate question is not how the populace is to be ruled, but what the teachers are to think. That is the question to be settled first: It is a preface to everything else."³ Indeed, in the economy of God for men, the faith that Christians hold remains the preface to all they do and say.

The question of particular theological doctrines stands second in importance to one's basal conception of Christianity as a living whole. It can be dealt with briefly. For purpose of illustration our attention may be confined to the doctrine of salvation. If justification be needed, it is sufficient that religion meets men most directly in its doctrine of divine help. When the spell of magical charms and incantation has disappeared, men seek a way of help from God. Yet entirely too near the borderland of magic stands the early answer of sacrifice as a means of divine aid. The Old Testament prophet continuously fought against its cruder forms. Apparently the futility first began to dawn upon him in connection with the hideous institution of human sacrifice. Finally, he worked his way away from it altogether. What doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly and love mercy?⁴ One psalmist reached a plane where, using the familiar language, he injected new meanings. Bring to God the sacrament of a good life, and put your trust in Him.⁵ Many another has caught the idea about justice or righteousness as the great require-

³ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals*, p. 321.

⁴ Micah VI, 6-8.

⁵ Ps. IV, 5.

ment in man, and the prime expression of God's relationship to him. The idea runs back to prophetic sensitivity. "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His waist, and faithfulness the girdle of His loins."⁶ So far had the messianic hope advanced. Salvation is through and through a moral process. The greatest among those seers was wont to say, "Be like your Heavenly Father; show His spirit in every relationship of life."

With such a start, what are Christians doing about it today? The majority turn their back to the prophetic summons and cling to some form of sacramentarianism as the way of salvation. God is pictured as having set up certain barriers that man must surmount. His help awaits from us a gift, a sacrament, good works, which often means liturgical proprieties. At length, the death of His Son can do for us what man is unable to for himself. The reasoning is as simple as it is fallacious. Above all, is its misrepresentation of God. Slander would be a more appropriate word. The position is: Man has sinned against the divine law, and so deserves death. Christ took man's place, and died for him. The (legal) justice of God is thus satisfied and God can forgive our transgressions.

Beyond imputing to God the character of a highhanded and inhuman judge, this interpretation plays havoc with several other elements in the situation. First, it separates the life of Jesus from the death of Jesus. This cannot be done without mutilating both. His life is the only adequate commentary upon his death. The only way to understand calvary is to live in Galilee. His death sets the seal of loyalty upon his life. Under the circumstances he would not play traitor with his own soul, and with the soul of all goodness. Second, this general view interprets the death of Jesus in terms of the false analogy of ancient sacrifice, of the Roman law court and of the countinghouse. Third, Jesus is thereby trans-

⁶ Isa. XI, 4.

formed beyond recognition into a pawn of a legalistic theology, using him as a basis for caricaturing both himself and the God whom he revealed in his life and death. Calvary is required to change God's attitude toward us, and Jesus is used as a part of the false drama. Christians ought to hesitate to say such things. Fourth, the operation of this scheme of salvation involves the transfer of guilt and goodness. In the moral world such a legalistic shunting back and forth of moral value appears to be the product of a wooden imagination, coupled with moral illiteracy. No such transfer ever did take place, nor ever will, just because it is impossible.

That kind of theologizing cast about for Scriptural support. The nearest they could find were the hints in the disproportionate amount of space devoted in the Gospels to the passion and death of Jesus. The second source are fragments of interpretation found in the letters of Saint Paul. The tragic death of Jesus bit into the memories of first-century disciples. After that, they looked upon his actions and heard his words as within a heavy shadow cast by his death. With characteristic intensity Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."⁷ Such preoccupation with the death and resurrection of Jesus is understandable. Yet that is very different from a justification of later constructions placed upon them. In Paul it made way for a very doubtful doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁸ It is not fair, however, to hold him responsible for the aberrations of his interpreters.

The truth lies much nearer at hand. Jesus lived the saved life. Salvation gets fully exemplified in him. God objectifies a gracious good will, which never changes toward men. The barriers of salvation are in men alone. His unfailing love constitutes His gift to all men. Salvation is accomplished by a personal moral transformation, through the work of God's

⁷ I Cor. II, 2.

⁸ Rom. III, 28; IV, 5; IX, 31.

righteous spirit, and on condition of our response. Jesus lived the saved life, and he called others to come and live by the same spirit. He was scorned by the "saved" people of his day. Finally he was crucified by them. When Jesus faced what they had prepared for him, over and over again he questioned himself: "Have I found the will of God for my life? If so, nothing else matters." Religious authorities were sure he was wrong. His own family felt sure he was mistaken. That is why he returned repeatedly to the fundamental question. That is why he thought so little about himself or the cross. "Weep not for me, but for yourselves," a discerning spirit made him say. Having lived a life of moral integrity, Jesus was afraid of nothing. The cross loomed as a horrible reality. He wavered long enough in Gethsemane to ask if there wasn't some other way. Then he began to pray in that magnificent "nevertheless." Calvary remains, but it is set in a new light. It is a fearful thing; but truth, he said, makes men free. Now he could verify that. God accepted the cross which men had erected for Jesus, and made it the revealer of the strength and beauty of a moral personality worthy of the handiwork of God. There was nothing magical or inevitable about it. Given the redeeming love of God and the heroic response of Jesus, you are confronted with the height of sublimity. Nothing finer was ever seen by mortals or by gods. Mark tells us, they sang a hymn, there under the very shadow of the cross. Strange fortitude, magnificent spirit! He set death to music, because he had first set human living in harmony with the will of God. Nothing could have compensated, had Jesus failed to grasp the quality of goodness which makes God divine. Jesus lived the saved life. That is what salvation means.

V. ADOPT CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

I have just been saying that Christian ethics should Christianize our religious ministrations and moralize theology. Not a few in our time would hold that attempt to be *contra*

bonos mores. Withstanding the fashions, the logic of moral experience appears to run that way. Walter Lippmann takes another course as the major conclusion of his *Preface to Morals*.⁹ The dilemma he states as follows:

They are compelled to choose consciously, clearly, and with full realization of what the choice implies, between religion as a system of cosmic government and religion as insight into a cleansed and matured personality: between God conceived as the master of that fate, creator, providence, and king, and God conceived as the highest good at which they might aim.

Apparently the dichotomy is complete. In that case, no anxiety can arise lest the fray end with ethics on the under side, defeated. But it does mean that Mr. Lippman ends up with a truncated ethics and a religion redefined simply as devotionism.

In justice to this stimulating author, however, it should be said that entirely too much of historical theology makes such a breach as he proposes quite necessary. On two other points also he is doubtless on the right trail.¹⁰ "If civilization is to be coherent and confident" a basic knowledge of moral ideals must serve as guide. That much is incontrovertible. Hence also, his insistence that "the original business of the moralist" consists in elucidating the ideals with which his world is pregnant. That, too, is very significant. What I seem to detect in his position, however, are two incompatible assumptions. One maintains that reality is an objective order which discloses its moral stability to a disinterested spirit of the questing soul. So far well and good. A second holds that in order to serve its educative function reality must be an impersonal and idealized projection of human ideals. Hence the religion of the spirit would yield a kind of Stoic poise as a man gave himself in devotion to his mature ideals. The religious quality lies in the devotion.

Quite the contrary, the educative function of moral ideals

⁹ Page 325.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

can be carried on only if those ideals are the everlasting reals. They can be the everlasting reals only in a value-charged system of reality. A value-charged system can be ultimately real only as values are personalized in nature. Values and personality are mutually constitutive.¹¹ W. R. Sorley puts the matter superbly:

When I say "love is good" or "justice is good," I mean that love as realized in a personal life is good, that justice as manifested in a man's character or in a social order is good. I do not mean that the mere abstract quality love or justice is also good. Good cannot be predicated of the abstract. It belongs only to the concrete—as I have already argued, to persons.¹²

Furthermore, it should be clear that reality as in part a projection of human ideals would be uncalled for, except that "human" had been from the first theoretically isolated from the nature of reality as a whole. Such a "human" conveys mainly the limitations of a reductionistic logic of modern naturalism.

Inadequate as I think this standpoint is, its value as a corrective for an abstract theory of the moral and religious life performs an important task. It helps to emphasize the continuity of the moral self with its actual environing conditions—an issue dealt with in the chapter on moral freedom. In view, therefore, of the entangling alliance between the whole spiritual life and its natural conditions, another task looms up before us. So far as possible the economic, social and political conditions within which Christian character is nurtured must be made favorable. I have an idea that this principle would be much more self-evident to us, if these environing conditions did not harbor vested interests. The self regards its property and social prerogatives as a part of itself. Any intimation that these things could be improved is interpreted as an attack upon our own person. Instinc-

¹¹ The terms person, personal, etc., can be made into weasel words. Here we are looking for an adequate symbol to denote the concrete-universal character of value.

¹² *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, p. 138.

tively we resent the attack. First we throw over our property and prerogatives the protective veil of necessary existence. "A man has to live—you know." Then, we begin to depersonalize it as fundamental to social security, and as a safeguard to law and order. Does not the constitution guarantee these things as natural rights, prior to all political organization? Rationalization now speeds up, and stops only with the provisions of the Ten Commandments and religion itself.

If we honestly want to become better Christians there are *four* considerations which stand by to help. In the first place, let each one ask himself, "What *things* are essential to the highest human life?" How much "goods" do I really need as a base on which to live a self-respecting life? Aristotle laid down as one of three indispensable *instruments*, a sufficiency of material goods. So far as that intends to go, has anyone improved upon it? Man has a body. It has certain inevitable needs: food, shelter, work, medical care, and so on. Apart from these conditions I cannot live at a human level. If I cannot dispense with these supplies, can anyone else? Can justice be prejudiced concerning basic necessities? If not, excess poverty and riches in a world where potential production is entirely adequate should be classed as criminal negligence. What are we waiting for? Who expects these matters to be cared for by magic? How have these conditions come to be? Were they produced by some impersonal natural law, as some of the eighteenth century political economists said? If I am irrational enough to ignore the claims of justice, do I mean that famine, pestilence, slums, and war will reduce the demand by eliminating other claimants? Then, how can I claim to want to live a self-respecting life? I can't. Then, how long can I vegetate? Will these destroyers of body pass me by? When I descend to this level of thinking, I have swallowed about my last pellet of sanity.

Then, a second alternative course opens up. It begins with an analysis of our personal attitude toward these supporting

conditions of moral selfhood. After that it goes on with a discovery of the vast difference between rationalization and thinking. Rationalization is the cynic's word. By it he tries to convince people that we never can do anything other than throw a canopy of plausibility over our prejudices. If that were true, not even the cynic should have discovered the ruse. We rationalize all too frequently, but we are able to do so only because we can by thinking relate our lives to fundamental realities. We can increasingly comprehend the true meaning of our situation. Therefore, in this respect, it is possible to make objective and true moral judgments. We can and do deceive ourselves. The marvel and the miracle of the human mind is that it can discover its mistakes and rectify them, not that it makes them. The science of human fallibility is not identical with the logic of thinking. Straight thinking about the conditions of moral personality is man's original business.

A historical survey of our current economic, social and political "principles" makes up a third step. In outline the economic procedures of modern society were published in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Four pillars support the main structure. To begin with, *man is incurably selfish*. He always acts in accordance with self-interest. That is the first law of human nature. Secondly, *the paramount motive in human action is the hope of economic gain*. "Profits" are the dynamo of all our efforts. The desire is submerged and often astutely disguised. It is none the less final and determinative. A third principle follows from the first two: *competition is the life of business*. If so, the fourth principle appears as a corollary: *The less government in business the better*. *Laissez faire, laissez-aller*. This hands-off policy comports with a frontier, preindustrial regime. In practice it means, let the government keep its hands off until I get what I can, then let the military power of the state defend what I have appropriated.

Obviously, each of these principles is false and misleading.

In turn, they hark back to an obsolete psychology, capitalize on an economy of economic scarcity, and make faulty deductions from abstract premises. Incidentally they help us to see why patriotism takes on so many frightfully distorted conceptions. Its individualism of "free" competition regards the primary function of the state as a defense of economic privileges. Totalitarianism, at the other extreme, grew out of an attempt to perform the first function for a few, and then found it easier to appropriate that property involved. Totalitarianism means economic desperation plus political autocracy. Either regime eliminates human personality as a standard of value. Both of them transpose moral value into economic value, human worth into money. No more radical denial of morality can be conceived. We would see that, except for the subtlety involved in this transvaluation of moral values, and that no practice has ever completely reached the logic upon which the outlook rests. If practice caught up with these theories, a human mode of living would disappear altogether.

About the finest proposal ever made comes by way of the Christian doctrine of stewardship. Here is our fourth ally. Christian stewardship must not be confused with tithing or any other plan for expenditure. It is a basic philosophy of life. Stewardship is as much concerned about how one acquires as how he spends. Methods are a supplementary consideration. Methods are devised to suit concrete conditions and occasions. Christian stewardship is a living principle. It holds first the unqualified supremacy of spiritual values over things. Since human personalities form the only concrete embodiment of spiritual values, personality must be revered as an intrinsic worth, an end in itself. This is the familiar principle known as the sacredness of human personalities. Hence an ideal of Christian personality constitutes the standard or norm of valuation. All property derives its value from its instrumental service in developing Christian character in all men. Therefore the organization of our economic

and social life in accordance with that principle becomes the first moral imperative about a primary conditional aspect of moral selfhood. So far from belittling the place of property and social relations as concomitant conditions of moral personality, this view enhances them and manifolds their actual worth. And if this logic holds for any one person, it holds with respect to all men. The sooner that reconstruction is accelerated the better. No more favorable hour will come. Cast up in a religious language these ideas may be stated in the following form. To follow Jesus means far more than to work for a Christian reconstruction of society. But it *does* mean that. When a man enters the Kingdom of God he takes with him the whole of his interests and activities. His personal regeneration includes both a renewed spirit and an interest in a renovated world; he accepts with other Christians the common obligation to work together to build an economic and social order most favorable to the growth of Christian character in all men; he believes that Christian justice demands the removal of all barriers to the abundant life in order that every person may face his own responsibility in respect to the claims of God upon his life, that what God wills we can do, and we must not evade His high calling.

VI. BECOME DISCIPLES OF JESUS

One vast presupposition underlies nearly everything that is contained in this volume: by His moral integrity Jesus of Nazareth translated the will of God into the language of human experience. In the profoundest sense, then, Jesus *lives*. He lives in all truth, and justice, and beauty, and reverence for the highest values. Apart from Him, the crowning revelation of God cannot be discovered. Sentences like these take in a lot of territory. I trust that I am not altogether ignorant of the unsolved problems which I have deemed inappropriate, though germane, to these discussions. Without being able to present many delicate questions in this connection, I would like simply to say with whatever force at my

command, *we Christians do not make enough of the moral stature of Jesus*. By that I only am trying to indicate that if we were more alive we would have outgrown other gods, and would honor his God: the quintessence of that kind of righteous love revealed in Jesus.

If that be true, Jesus takes on paramount significance for Christians. But the tantalizing problem which arises now is, what Jesus? On a moment's reflection, many constructions of Him come piling in. Doubtless, the question is not, which one shall I choose? Each of them brings some twilight ray about Him. Jesus has been embalmed in a thousand creeds, psychologized in manifold languages, and historico-sociologized (sic) in countless portraits. Well, for all that, it would be a good thing to keep a critical eye out for light from every source, and not to fall into the pit of taking partial insight as a final edition of the truth. A writer of the gospel of *John* affixes a fine postscript: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the book that should be written." That is appropriate modesty, and it is not meant to be read by any literalist. Jesus, he is saying, is too majestic a personality to be captured by neat theories. And since moral stature requires the insight of morally good men to take its dimensions our handicap is not easily overcome. Where "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is revealed one can afford to live deeply, and with a sense of an inexhaustible Presence.

Sometimes I wish the nickname Christian had not survived. It has its advantages. But consider what it might have meant had the people of this fellowship been content to specialize on becoming disciples of Jesus—the real Jesus who made the profound righteousness of God incarnate by His living. But never mind what might have been. Think instead on our vantage point, how it is possible to allow the time forms of his life and teachings to fall away until his timeless personality stands revealed.

If we could see Him, what language would we borrow His truth to declare? How would the symbolism of the Christmas story do? Then the gospel stories should have closed also with its daring pageantry. Come to think of it, I suppose that Easter has the same theme. Take your choice. Here we will consider Christmas. That is an eternally snow-crowned Mount Shasta that towers over the lesser hills, the plains, and the valleys of Biblical topography. Christmas conveys the most majestic thought that the mind of man has to date entertained.

The adventurous love of God, Christmas is saying, succeeded in Jesus. God's best word, in the beautiful language of an ancient Hellenist, was made flesh and dwelt among us, the word full of grace and truth. In Him were crowned all the agonies and triumph of divine love through countless ages. Christmas morning employs the homely symbol of the human family relationship to declare that, in principle and therefore in a consummate hope, righteous love has won its way with humankind. In celebration of this epitome of creative righteousness, these good news writers march out all the pageantry of a sanctified imagination. Only by such symbolism can they point up a truth so incredibly exquisite. The righteous love of God rules the world. Alleluia! Let the heavenly bodies move out of their orbits and a heavenly chorus sing a song of triumph and endless praise. Let there be a song in the air . . . and a baby's low cry. For the righteousness of God and parental love unite in constituting the sacrament of human personality, and so had saved the world.

Christians cannot too often be reminded that His life created the Christmas story; not the story, His life. The utterly transcendent reality of God's righteous spirit was verified in the moral integrity of His life. In the soul of Jesus was the triumph first celebrated. The man whose living inspired the story of the gospels is greater than the picture they bring. He had to penetrate all of their handicaps and ours,

so that at length we too might see that He lives by the authority of eternal truth made alive.

Cynics scoff. That is the way of insulated ignorance, in souls where poetry has never come alive. Not righteous love, they say, but brute force is the master-ruler of men and gods alike. When the cave man stood over his first victim, he hadn't heard of righteous love. In the rough and tumble of the modern mart, righteous love sounds like the consolation of sentimental weaklings. Each Christmas morning the Caia-phases and the Pilates scoff anew at this visionary who droned out His platitudes about righteous love being the ultimate law of life, both human and divine. Today and tomorrow cave men the world over, in high places and in low, in derision will ask, where is your God who is going to save a world like this with a baby? Why doesn't he try the cohorts of the skies and club men into submission? That would be ruling them. To all this the Christmas story says that the God of Jesus lives and works eternally against every thrust of brutality, in every agonizing cry of the weak and defenseless, in the patient protest of the victims of exploitation by human greed, in the faithful ministrations of the family circle, in the loyalties of all builders of a better world. That God is here, as Frank Mason North taught us to sing:

Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man!

In haunts of wretchedness and need,
On shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed,
We catch the vision of thy tears.

.

The cup of water given for thee
Still holds the freshness of thy grace;
Yet long these multitudes to see
The sweet compassion of thy face.

O Master, from the mountain side,
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among these restless throngs abide,
O tread the city's streets again,

Till sons of men shall learn Thy love
And follow where Thy feet have trod;
Till, glorious from Thy heaven above,
Shall come the city of our God!

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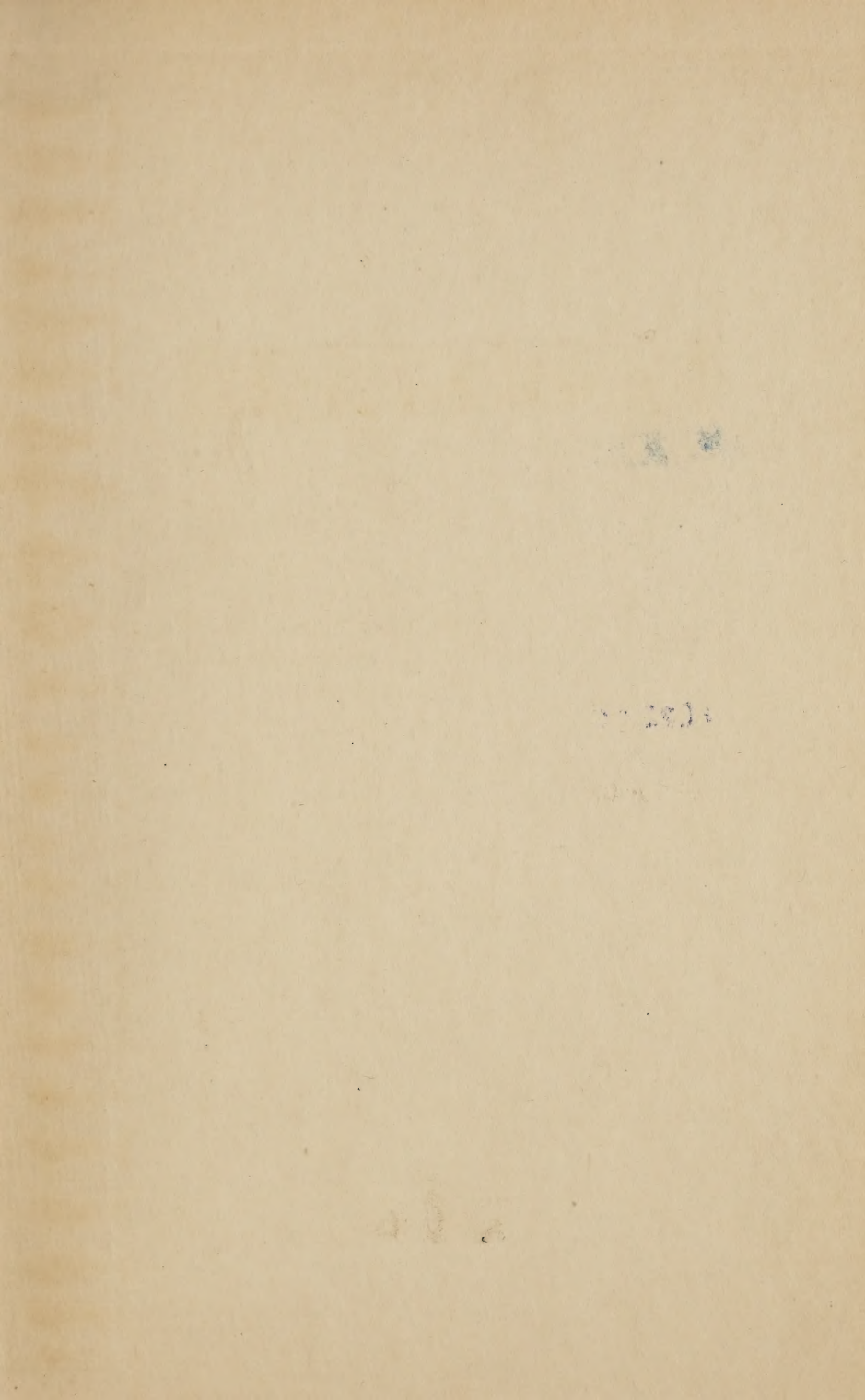
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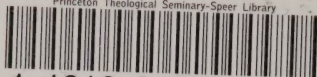
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